



MARCH 2006

American Cinematographer

TSOTSI

LANCE GEWER SHOOTS
A SEARING DRAMA

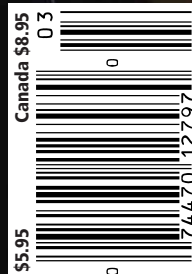
NEIL YOUNG: HEART OF GOLD

ELLEN KURAS, ASC
SPOTLIGHTS A ROCK ICON

THE NOTORIOUS BETTIE PAGE

MOTT HUPFEL REVEALS ALL

PLUS: JACK CARDIFF, BSC RECALLS THE GLORIES
OF THREE-STRIP TECHNICOLOR





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Features

30

An Angry Young Man

Lance Gewer lends emotional intensity to the South African drama *Tsotsi*

42

Heart and Soul

Ellen Kuras, ASC captures a memorable concert performance in *Neil Young: Heart of Gold*

50

Retro Sexy

Mott Hupfel frames an erotic icon in *The Notorious Bettie Page*

58

A Master's Palette

Jack Cardiff, BSC recalls his stunning work with three-strip Technicolor

66

A Style of Subtlety

Sydney Pollack is honored by the ASC for his filmmaking achievements



On Our Cover:
A young South African gangster (Presley Chweneyagae) experiences major life changes in *Tsotsi*, shot by Lance Gewer. (Photo by Blid Alsbirk, courtesy of Miramax Films.)



42



50

Departments

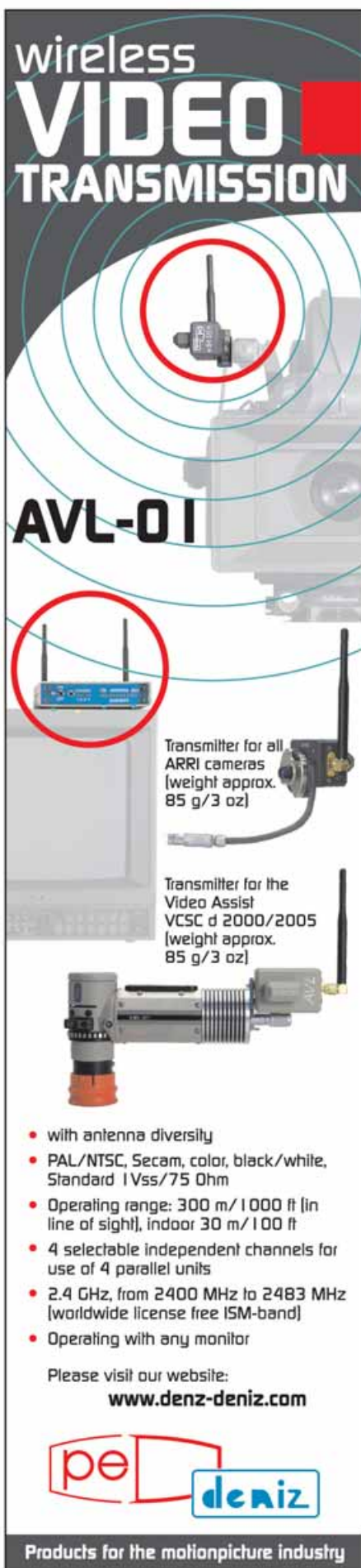
- 8 Editor's Note
- 10 President's Desk
- 14 DVD Playback
- 20 Production Slate
- 72 Short Takes
- 76 Post Focus
- 81 New Products & Services
- 86 Points East
- 90 International Marketplace
- 91 Classifieds
- 92 Ad Index
- 93 Clubhouse News
- 94 ASC Membership Roster
- 96 ASC Close-Up



58

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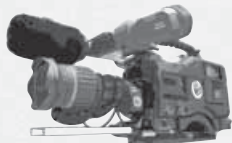
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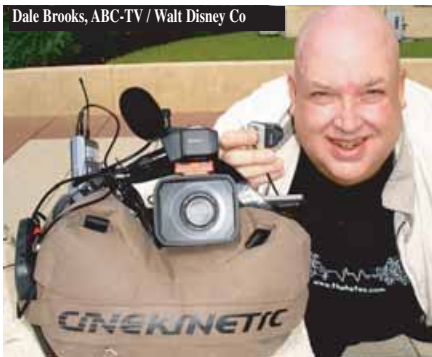
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Editor's Note



This month's special focus on independent productions led us to investigate a number of intriguing projects that reflected the indie ethos either in concept or budget.

While attending the AFI Fest in Hollywood last fall, senior editor Rachael Bosley was impressed by Lance Gewer's cinematography on the South African drama *Tsotsi*, which tells the story of a young gangster who begins to change his violent ways after taking charge of a newborn baby left behind during a carjacking ("An Angry Young Man," page 30). The film's imagery reflects the teen's emotional and psychological

evolution in understated ways. "The cinematography of *Tsotsi* lies in interiors, the emotional states of the characters," says Gewer, whose earlier work had earned the admiration of director Gavin Hood. "There isn't much camera movement, and when there is a move it's always dictated by the choreography of the characters and the story. Our work was more about keeping the camera quite still, exercising restraint, studying the characters and trying to get to know them quite intimately. We worked with the emotional beats of the story, trying to catch every nuance and implication."

Inner emotions are also on display in *Neil Young: Heart of Gold*, a visually rapturous concert film shot by Ellen Kuras, ASC for director Jonathan Demme (who previously demonstrated his innovative approach to the genre with the 1984 Talking Heads film *Stop Making Sense*). The cinematographer's ardent enthusiasm for Young's music is reflected in her evocative work on the picture, which represents a record of two shows staged at Nashville's historic Ryman Auditorium. Kuras took full advantage of a series of painted backdrops created by Michael Zansky: "They're like landscapes of memory, which echoes the Canadian prairie/childhood Neil sings about, without being literal. We wanted each song to be like a painting within a painting." She offers many other insights in a piece penned by New York correspondent John Pavlus ("Heart and Soul," page 42).

The Notorious Bettie Page also demonstrates an affection for its real-life inspiration, a pinup model who became an erotic icon after posing for a series of fetish photos during the uptight 1950s. Despite the project's modest budget, cinematographer Mott Hupfel and director Mary Harron took an ambitious approach to the picture's visuals, shooting primarily in black-and-white but also employing splashes of vivid, eye-catching color. Hupfel detailed his full range of strategies for New York scribe John Calhoun ("Retro Sexy," page 50).

Other notable indie projects are also on offer in this month's installments of Production Slate (page 20), Short Takes (page 72) and Post Focus (page 76).

This issue also features salutes to a pair of cinematic titans: cinematographer Jack Cardiff, BSC, who recalled his triumphant work in three-strip Technicolor for historian Robert S. Birchard ("A Master's Palette," page 58), and producer/director/actor Sydney Pollack, who was profiled by David E. Williams after earning the ASC's Board of Governors Award ("A Style of Subtlety," page 66).

Stephen Pizzello
Executive Editor

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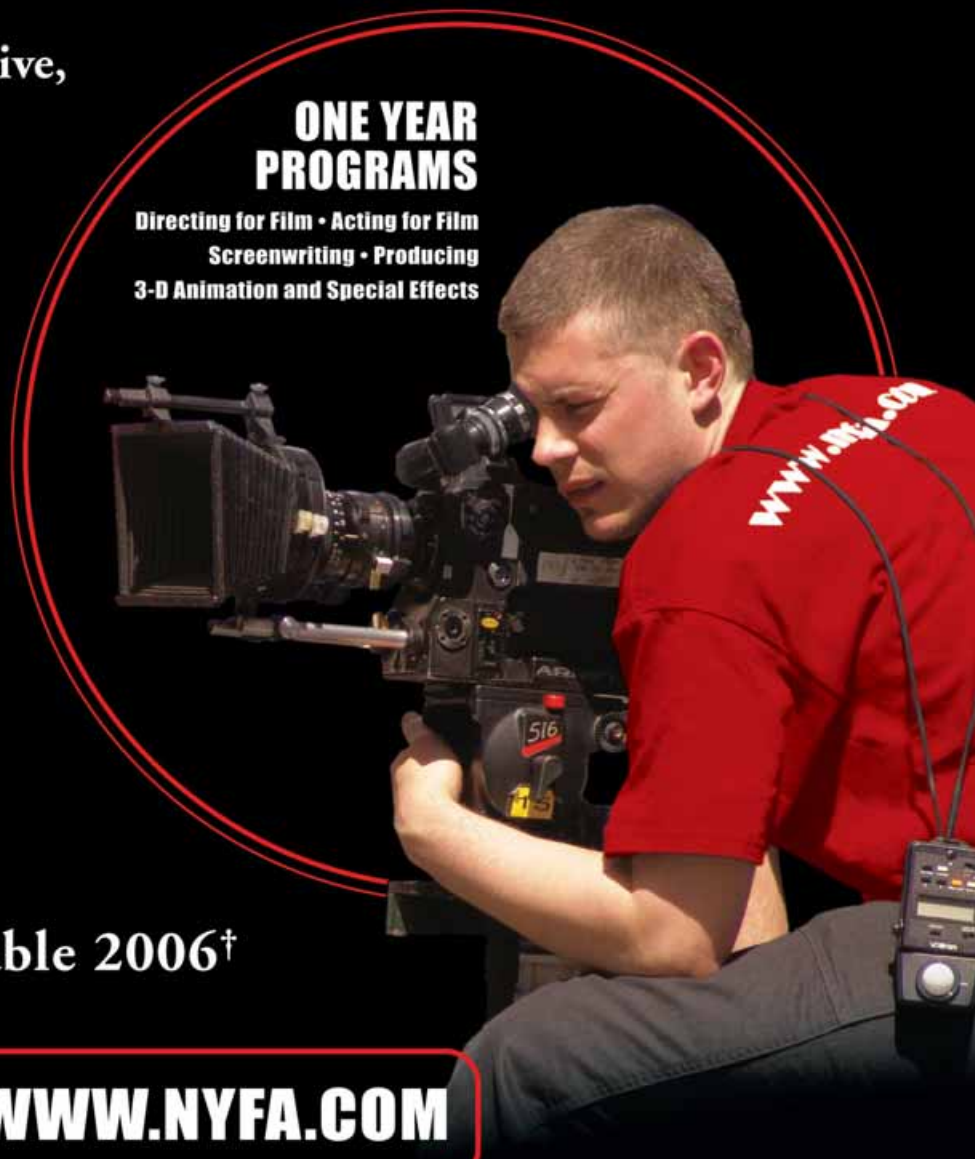
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President's Desk



Currently, a movement is afoot in the United States to make the camera operator a negotiable, elective position. The adoption of this practice will essentially put an end to the operator's presence on our crews, save for exceptional cases. In my opinion, there is no possible way to justify such a misguided idea. If this horrifying prospect actually becomes reality, it won't just be the operators who will feel the repercussions — the entire industry will suffer.

While the tiniest percentage of cinematographers still choose to keep their own eyes to the finder, the rest of us (myself included) believe strongly in the vital, indispensable role of the camera operator. There are a number of reasons why this way of working has been the industry standard for more than 80 years, and any one of them is compelling enough justification for the mandatory inclusion of this individual on our crew.

Camera operating is a full-time, full-attention job. Maintaining composition; enforcing eyelines; executing smooth moves; watching focus; noting errant shadows and objects; flagging anomalies in hair, makeup, costumes and set dressing — all of these duties are performed in real time as the camera is running. Operators must also serve as fully deputized liaisons with the other departments; help to determine equipment needs; help to refine blocking; and otherwise assist the cinematographer in any of a hundred different ways. Plainly, these responsibilities require the complete and undivided attention of a single person.

From their position behind the lens, camera operators are the first to see our work, and they do so in infinitely greater detail than anyone in video village; only their word is immutable when it comes to the question of whether you've got the shot. Most cinematographers have done their share of operating on low- or no-budget films. Speaking from experience, much of the execution is intuitive — similar, in a sense, to making music. If any distraction is indulged, even for an instant, the shot will already be blown. From any perspective, serving as cinematographer is an all-encompassing pursuit; when you do both jobs at the same time, one or the other is inevitably shortchanged.

Camera operating is a unique talent and is not part of every cinematographer's skillset. Ever see someone new to the geared head attempt to use it? It's like watching a camel try to climb a ladder. Even the relatively simpler fluid head demands a tremendous sensitivity in order to be handled effectively. While most cinematographers like to think of themselves as good operators, the truth is that many of us are better at imitating camels.

Although there are aspects of the operator's job that can be learned and improved upon, the essence of it is nothing short of a God-given ability. The qualities that elevate some operators are the same intangibles that allow certain cinematographers to achieve greatness: superior taste and artistry. The best operators always move their eyes during the shot and make literally hundreds of minute and organic adjustments on the fly. Their ability to think on their feet — not only to flirt with perfection, but to rescue what might surely end up as a busted take — makes them worth 10 times their pay in their real value to a production.

Then there are the overtly physical attributes. Hand-to-eye coordination is a given, as are a good set of legs and a strong back. Operators often find themselves working from some unusually contorted positions. And imagine shooting a 90-day schedule, sometimes completely handheld. If lighting that much of a film isn't enough to kill you, I promise that the additional wear and tear of operating at the same time will do the trick.

The camera operator saves time and money by freeing up the cinematographer. The days of the cinematographer sitting in a chair and pointing to the greenbeds are long over. Here in the U.S., most of us confer with the director to establish the frame or choose the camera move. After that, our work really begins. As anyone who has recently lit a set of almost any size will confirm, this act requires more of our involvement than ever before. Hi-def shoots in particular require the cinematographer to spend an inordinate amount of time in a dark tent, glued to a monitor. Without a camera operator, it's impossible to work effectively in this fashion.

Let's end right now the ridiculous perception that camera operators work only while the shot is happening. Their contribution is equally significant while we're lighting; this is the point when their penchant for finding faster, more efficient ways of doing things really shines. Plus, the extra set of eyes helps us avoid mistakes that can lead to delays. Listen up, producers: *this saves time and money!* If anyone ever sat down to figure out how much is gained by having a seasoned camera operator on hand, I'm sure an Act of Congress would guarantee their presence on every set.

Still not convinced? If the camera operator helps save an average of five minutes per setup over the course of a 25-setup day... well, you do the math.

And then there's everything else. In large part, the camera department has hewed to the tradition of making its members advance through the ranks before attaining the status of cinematographer. Operating represents a crucial step in the learning process. Furthermore, serving on a camera crew in any capacity demands a lot of double-checking and backup. The operator's perch provides a rare view of the entire enterprise that often serves as an early-warning system for the cinematographer. With the operator at the eyepiece and the cinematographer standing close by, it becomes easier to spot anything that might negatively affect the frame.

To state the case best, there has yet to be a movie made on which the camera operator's technical savvy and creativity didn't contribute in many substantive ways to making the whole show better. Need I say more?

Richard P. Crudo, ASC
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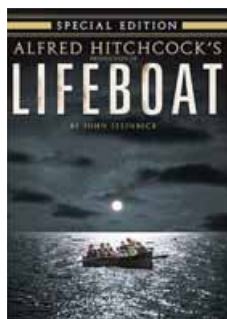
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Alfred Hitchcock was never one to back away from a technical or logistical challenge, but on the 1944 production *Lifeboat*, he faced a problem that was particularly daunting. The film has just one extremely small location — the titular lifeboat — and nine characters, so the question for Hitchcock and his collaborators was how to make such a limited canvas visually and dramatically compelling. A screenplay by acclaimed writers John Steinbeck and Jo Swerling certainly helped generate tension, but what really gives the film its energy is an innovative visual approach, which brought Oscar nominations to both Hitchcock and his cinematographer, Glen MacWilliams, ASC.

Lifeboat's premise allows for a classic Hitchcockian moral exploration: the eight survivors of a German bombing are stranded in a lifeboat, where they pick up a ninth passenger, a stranded Nazi. Within the confined setting, MacWilliams rarely repeats compositions or angles, which is one of the reasons the movie doesn't feel stilted or theatrical. Another is the picture's sophisticated manipulation of point of view, as Hitchcock and MacWilliams (who had previously collaborated on *Waltzes From Vienna*)

employ subtle changes in lighting and camera placement that shift the viewer's identification from one character to another. Although *Lifeboat* is a wartime thriller and Hitchcock was fiercely loyal to Britain and the United States, the complexity of the screenplay and the artistry on display prevent the film from becoming didactic.

MacWilliams' black-and-white cinematography is stylish yet extremely functional; whenever he uses light to express character or theme, the light is practically motivated rather than purely self-conscious. In one shot, for example, a shadow passes over the duplicitous German's face, emphasizing his dual nature, and it is caused by a realistic source: a sail blowing in the wind. Images like this abound in *Lifeboat*, and light, camera movement and content become inextricably bound to one another.

20th Century Fox's new DVD captures many of these images beautifully, though the disc is far from perfect. Scratches and other artifacts in the source material are particularly evident in the opening scenes, and there are minor picture flaws throughout the movie. Nevertheless, there are many striking passages in which the richness of MacWilliams' photography is impeccably captured, particularly in scenes where he uses extreme contrast to convey the moral ambiguity of the characters.

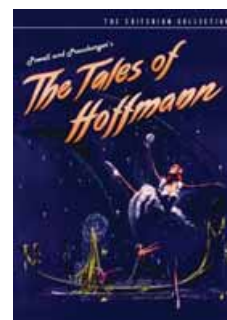
The use of sound in *Lifeboat* is every bit as impressive as the visuals, and in some ways extremely audacious for a Hollywood studio film of that era. The filmmakers eschewed a traditional score in favor of a dense combination of overlapping dialogue, ambient noise, and silence — in fact, some of the most dramatic moments in the picture are distinguished by a nearly total lack of sound. The DVD's monaural soundtrack preserves the intricate sound design with clarity and precision, and an equally

strong stereo mix is featured as well.

An outstanding audio commentary is provided by film-studies professor Drew Casper, who combines biography, historical context and aesthetic analysis. Even avowed Hitchcock scholars will gain new insights and learn new facts from Casper's thorough investigation of what he unhesitatingly calls one of Hitchcock's masterworks.

Casper's insights are complemented and expanded upon by a 20-minute documentary, "The Theater of War," in which he is interviewed along with Hitchcock's daughter and granddaughter. The featurette is brief but informative, and allows viewers a look at the tank on the Fox lot where the entire film was shot. Steinbeck scholar Robert Demott provides a bit of background on Steinbeck's role in the production. (Contemporary viewers may be surprised to learn that *Lifeboat* was not particularly popular at the time of its release because many misinterpreted its political stance.) A theatrical trailer and gallery of photos complete the supplements.

— Jim Hemphill



The Tales of Hoffmann (1951)
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THE ART OF CINEMATOGRAPHY: TELLING THE STORY ON FILM

burger's vivid adaptation of Jacques Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffmann*. In making the picture, Powell and Pressburger (the legendary British filmmaking team known as The Archers) built upon the fantasy elements of their earlier films, particularly *The Red Shoes*, to create an entirely unique atmosphere in which to mount the stories of poet E.T.A. Hoffmann as seen through Offenbach's eyes.

In a surrealistic theatrical space, Hoffmann (Robert Rounseville) fancies three different women for each of the opera's three acts. In Act 1: The Tale of Olympia, he is infatuated with a radiant dancing doll (Moirá Shearer). In Act 2: The Tale of Guliatta, he is bewitched by a Venetian courtesan (Ludmilla Tcherina) and desperately tries to win her affection. Finally, in Act 3: The Tale of Antonia, Hoffmann passionately proclaims his love to an ailing singer (Ann Ayars). Each of these acts, as well as a prologue and epilogue, set Hoffmann up with an idealized woman, only to have her consumed by an older male with sinister intentions. Played in each vignette by famed ballet dancer Robert Helpmann, this older man — a crazed dollmaker, a satanic Svengali, and a seductive doctor — foils all of Hoffmann's attempts at romance.

To mount this dark, operatic fantasy, The Archers enlisted production designer Hein Heckroth to create a lush arena where song and dance could convey the narrative to the camera. Heckroth had won an Academy Award for his work on *The Red Shoes*, and his bold, rich design for *Hoffmann* would earn him another nomination. Heckroth's plans required an expert cinematographer, and The Archers chose frequent collaborator Christopher Challis, who had previously shot *The Small Black Room*, *Gone to Earth* and *The Elusive Pimpernel* for them. Aware that each act of the film was designed around a single primary color, Challis sought to convert the lighting effects of a staged musical or opera to the cinema frame. He noted that in live theater, the human eye could read the subtlest of shadings, and low light was often used

to achieve distance effects. After determining that a wide-ranging use of light would be essential for *Hoffmann*, the cinematographer set up one of the most elaborate arc-light grids in the history of British cinema. Indeed, Challis noted in his autobiography (*Are They Really So Awful?*) that at the time of production, no other British film had ever used as many lamps for the Technicolor palette.

The Criterion Collection recently released *Hoffmann* on DVD with excellent results. The dual-layer DVD-9 boasts an effective home-screen realization of Technicolor's three-strip process. Challis' extraordinary lighting is well realized in a consistently pleasing picture transfer. The nearly pristine source material from the British Film Institute's restoration internegative is crisp, featuring rich colors and deep shadings. The monaural audio track is free from age-related defects and plays smoothly.

Borrowing from its 1992 laserdisc edition of *Hoffmann*, Criterion has included an excellent audio commentary by director Martin Scorsese and film-music historian Bruce Eder. Both men make interesting points about the film, with Eder focusing more on the film's place in the musical and opera-film genres and Scorsese noting numerous creative and technical flourishes. In addition to the film's theatrical trailer, supplements include production stills, a collection of Heckroth's design sketches, a solid essay written by film scholar Ian Christie, Powell's 1956 short film *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, and a charming interview with cult horror filmmaker George A. Romero. (Romero gushes over *Hoffmann* and notes its unusual influence on his own films.)

Criterion has once again dusted off a title from its laserdisc library and updated it for DVD with superb results. The Archers' unique fantasy of seduction and betrayal is not for all tastes, but it is certainly a landmark in its approach to storytelling, musical performance, cinematography and production design. At a time when musical films have difficulty finding an

audience, it is refreshing to be reminded of such a well produced, artistic and clever film treatment of an opera. In the storied career of The Archers, this is a crown jewel.

— Kenneth Sweeney



***The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (1970)**

2.35:1 (16x9 Enhanced)
Dolby Digital 5.1, 6.1 DTS-ES,
Dolby Surround 2.0, Monaural
Blue Underground, \$29.95

Two Italian masters of cinematic style, writer/director Dario Argento and cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC, conspired on the unusual 1970 thriller *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, the auspicious feature debut of both filmmakers. This new two-disc DVD from specialty distributor Blue Underground serves as the best-yet video incarnation of the film in any format, making it a unique and invaluable introduction to both men's careers.

Loosely based on the 1949 short story "The Screaming Mimi," which was first adapted by Hollywood in 1958, *Crystal Plumage* opens as Sam (Tony Musante), an American writer living in Rome, inadvertently stumbles upon a murder taking place in a chic art gallery. Inside, he can see a beautiful woman (Eva Renzi) grappling with a black-garbed figure at the top of a treacherous stairway, each fighting to control a long-bladed knife. Shot in Technicolor Rome's proprietary two-perf Techniscope widescreen process — used here under the trade name Cromoscope — the film immediately takes advantage of its 2.35:1 frame in this harrowing scene,



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as Sam tries to enter the gallery through the double glass doors of its atrium-like opening. He is immediately trapped between them, with the resultant enclosure transformed into a transparent prison from which he helplessly watches the bloodied woman suffer after the killer flees the scene. It has been said that Argento conceived of Sam's predicament while watching fish circling in an aquarium, and Storaro's compositions perfectly capture this concept, as the gallery's glass-walled chamber fills the frame edge-to-edge, presenting our ostensible hero as a human "exhibit."

After the police fail to find their suspect, Sam decides to investigate the case on his own, and he soon gains the attention of the maniac and those who seek to conceal his identity.

Designed by production designer Dario Micheli, the film's careful yet pervasive use of primary blues, reds and yellows adds a distinctive visual touch that foreshadows Storaro's color-rich work in subsequent films. Indeed, it's not every picture that features a mysterious nocturnal assassin (Reggie Nalder) clad in a Day-Glo yellow jacket, a bold sartorial selection that ultimately ensures his escape from Sam.

A later chase sequence offers one of the film's most facile yet effective images: the darkness of a jet-black frame is suddenly pierced as Sam bursts through a doorway in the distance, the bright amber light casting him in a tense silhouette as he seeks to find his assailant. Without warning, the lights come up, revealing that the fiendish killer has cleverly led Sam back to the art gallery for nefarious reasons.

A lively and highly informative audio commentary by film journalists Alan Jones (author of the authoritative tome *Profundo Argento*) and Kim Newman not only succinctly dissects the production but also places it in the context of the times, crediting the film's many innovations and explaining how they later impacted the genre.

Disc two offers four brief featurettes: "Out of the Shadows,"

which features an anecdote-rich interview with Argento; "Painting With Darkness," a more conceptual discussion with Storaro; "The Music of Murder," an interview with composer Ennio Morricone; and "Eva's Talking," featuring actress Renzi. In their respective interviews, both Argento and Storaro are candid about their frustrating-yet-fruitful collaboration, and each offers genuine admiration for the other's abilities while politely skirting any specifics.

— David E. Williams

NEXT MONTH'S REVIEWS



An Unmarried Woman (1970)

Cinematographer:

Arthur Ornitz



The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants (2005)

Cinematographer:

John Bailey, ASC



Mysterious Skin (2005)

Cinematographer:

Steve Gainer, ASC

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Production Slate

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Right: Dr. Philip Latham (Andrew Parks) sympathizes with Dr. Sheila Bexter's (Fay Masterson) theory of "foreheadial" intelligence. Below: Latham and Bexter work on isolating the untapped power of human intelligence.



When Foreheads Collide

by Robert S. Birchard

"A cinematographer will never get a job off the projects Larry does," laughs cinematographer Kevin Jones, who has shot two pictures with writer/director Larry Blamire. *"The Lost Skeleton of Cadavra"* was in black-and-white and had a deliberately cheap, underlit look [see *AC* April '04], and *Trail of the Screaming Forehead* is deliber-

ately overlit. We didn't need to worry about unnatural light sources; we had heavy backlight and often unmotivated keylights. My gaffer had a problem with the look of the picture, but we assured him it was *supposed* to look that way."

Shot in the imaginary "miracle of CraniaScope" with the imprimatur "Ray Harryhausen Presents," *Trail of the Screaming Forehead* tells of an earthly invasion by alien foreheads and has a subplot involving Dr. Sheila Bexter (Fay

Masterson), a scientist who discovers that the center of human intelligence is the forehead rather than the brain. Bexter isolates this untapped power by means of an extract she calls "Foreheadizene." Her amorously inclined boyfriend, Dr. Philip Latham (Andrew Parks) is a willing guinea pig for Bexter's experimental potion in hopes that his cooperation will lead to more than a goodnight kiss. The serum transforms Latham's puny human head until it becomes all forehead. In the end, it's the foreheads from outer space vs. The Forehead from Earth in a battle to the finish. Will civilization as we know it survive?

The Lost Skeleton of Cadavra, shot on MiniDV and produced on a miniscule budget, was picked up for distribution by Sony Pictures in 2001 and gained a small but avid cult following. A press agent could make much of the fact that the budget for Blamire's new film is nearly 20 times higher than the production cost of *Cadavra*, but don't imagine some mega-buck Hollywood blockbuster. All in all, *Forehead* cost well under \$1 million.

"The idea for *Forehead* came to me just after I finished *Lost Skeleton*," recalls Blamire. "*Lost Skeleton* was a takeoff on the ultra-cheap Ed Wood style of film from the 1950s. *Forehead* is in a similar vein but more polished. I wrote it for the principal cast from *Skeleton*, but it doesn't have the intentionally stilted acting style of that film. This was envisioned in color with the bright look of early 1960s CinemaScope and more sophisticated special effects, including stop-motion animation. Stop motion is magic, and it has a different feel than the digital effects being done today."

Although it only amounts to 10



Trail of the Screaming Forehead photos by Robert Deveau and Robert Birchard, courtesy of Larry Blamire.



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Above: Latham's brow unexpectedly begins to expand after he serves as Bexter's guinea pig. **Below:** Cinematographer Kevin Jones frames up a forehead.

or 12 shots and less than two minutes of footage, the stop-motion animation is what led Harryhausen to attach his name to *Forehead*. It was also the hook that brought Chiodo Bros. Productions — Charles, Richard and Edward Chiodo — into the project. The brothers have lent their talents as visual-effects wizards, animators, and character and prosthetic designers to such projects as *Team America: World Police* (AC Nov. '04), *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, *Robocop* and *Killer Klowns From Outer Space*.

For *Forehead*, Charles Chiodo designed the forehead prosthetics and the three stages of Latham's transformation based on an illustration by Blamire. "We love the older science-fiction films so much that even with the limited budget, we were eager to work on *Forehead*," says Stephen Chiodo. "Larry really gets what these films were about. They had real drama, real threats

and real love stories. Even though the budgets were small and the effects were often terrible, the actors never winked at the camera. They believed in what they were doing."

Script, principal cast and special effects aside, getting even a low-budget film off the ground requires belief and faith of a more tangible sort. Financing came from "Lucky" Swift, an attorney who "wanted to get out of the law business." Swift explains, "I started to watch *Lost Skeleton*, and I almost turned it off after the first 10 minutes, but then I got hooked. My husband and I were impressed with Larry's work, and we tracked him down and became acquainted. He showed me the script for *Forehead*, and I found it intelligently goofy. When his original investors fell through, I told him I'd finance the picture. Every one of my financial advisers counseled against it, but it felt right to me,

and after all, you only go around once."

Although *Forehead* was originally scheduled for 23 days of principal photography, line producer Betsy Mackey convinced Blamire it could be shot in 18. "It may seem like stating the obvious," says Mackey, "but the drawback of working on a low-budget film is the low budget. You can't simply throw money at a problem. There was no way we could spend 23 days shooting if we were going to get the locations we needed and the caliber of crew we wanted." Mackey scouted locations herself, only hiring a location manager for one week to make sure the proper permits were obtained. "We were fortunate to find locations we could double up on," she says. "There were something like 30 locations described in the script, but ultimately, we only had to make four moves."

Obviously, the shorter schedule presented challenges for the production team. "You never have enough days, and cutting back from 23 to 18 days [lost us] the opportunity for more coverage," says Jones. "Fortunately, Larry storyboards everything, which is a huge plus on a low-budget picture because you don't have a lot of time to experiment. But we weren't slaves to the boards; Larry was open to suggestions, and we also looked for setups we could eliminate."

Jones shot *Forehead* on a Sony HDW-F900 Series 3 high-definition (HD) video camera that was rented from HD Cinema in Santa Monica. The rental house was close to one of the company's major locations, the Veterans Hospital in West Los Angeles. "We shot 24p and composed for 2.35:1 with masks on the monitor and in the viewfinder," says the cinematographer. "I was a little concerned that we would be sacrificing some of the 16x9 image area by composing for 2.35. Canon was coming out with an anamorphic adapter, but it wasn't yet available. George Lucas and others had used the Sony system with 2.35 framing and proved it would work, so we went that way."

"The idea was to get the look of a picture like Jerry Lewis' *The Nutty Professor*," he continues, "so we chose



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**Rev. Beaks
(James Karen,
right) serves as
host to one of
the many alien
foreheads
invading Earth.**



middle-of-the-road camera settings that we found on Band Pro's Web site, band prodigital.com, emphasizing primary colors over a wider range of colors. The sets and costumes had strong blues and reds and pure whites. The flesh tones were not necessarily flattering; they were kind of warm. I lit the principals using Straw gels on the lights.

"We did the best we could to get a film look, and we may be able to do more in post," Jones continues. "[¾" CCD] HD cameras have virtually unlimited depth of field, which of course detracts from the film look. We had a good Canon cine-style zoom lens that went from 25mm to 100mm. We used the long end of the zoom and shot wide open at a shutter speed of 1/48 of a second with an ASA rating of 320 at a T2.2 aperture to compress the depth of field. There are ND filters built into the camera that you can dial in, but we also used ND filters on the lens. The Canon zoom wasn't always as long as we needed it to be, but we also did a lot of wide-angle stuff, and it was good for that."

Jones and his crew — camera operator Gianni Trutman, first assistant Frank Chritchlow, and second assistant Tony Denham — found there were advantages and disadvantages to working in hi-def video. "We shot at a 10:1 ratio, 26 rolls of 45-minute tapes — 19½ hours of footage," says Jones. "There was never a consideration for the number of takes or how much

footage we were shooting. That would have been a budget concern if we'd been shooting film. On the other hand, there are more steps required in post to get an HD production to a theatrical release, and there are fewer lenses available for the cameras.

"Also, HD's power requirement is higher and the camera is cable-bound a fair amount. We didn't need to sync to an external recorder. We recorded the production sound in the camera, but that meant we were also wired to the sound mixer. Fortunately, it wasn't a problem because we were working close to the sound guy. We carried a generator all the time except for the last day, and most of the time the camera was plugged into AC power, but we did have batteries to use as needed. I always took a battery-powered monitor on location so we could go mobile."

Jones is enthusiastic about the F900's performance but notes that there was one baffling breakdown. "Equipment is always going to break down from time to time, and there's never a right time for it to happen," says the cinematographer. "One day we started getting some electronic glitches where the camera seemed to overheat and shut off. I'd never had that happen before. We swapped out a couple of components and shaded the camera, and that seemed to solve the problem, but we're still not quite sure what caused it. Overall, though, we had a pretty good production record."

A Period Hi-Def Project by Noah Kadner

The setting for *Formosa* is Albuquerque, New Mexico. It's 1951, and Clay Crawford (Jamieson Stern) is on the run from the law when he happens upon Formosa, a social-guidance-film studio on the skids. Eagerly adopted by studio chief Sid Silver (Steven Gilborn) and his daughter, Anne-Marie (Jessica Kiper), Clay lends his bad-boy aura to Formosa's previously inhibited and static 16mm black-and-white teen films. In the process, he woos Anne-Marie and becomes the studio's top actor.

Formosa was my feature-directing debut, and to make the digital production I teamed with director of photography Tyler Oliver. "I love a challenge," says Oliver, "so when you came to me with an indie set in the Fifties with a large cast, lots of greenscreen compositing, and almost no money, I said, 'Let's do it!'"

Oliver and I had worked on several short films and industrials together, and we share a philosophy of using limitations as creative inspiration. On a recent project for the United Nations, we created a short espionage thriller to illustrate proper security protocols. "I think the U.N. was expecting a dry corporate video," says Oliver, "but we incorporated recognizable talent, CG effects, expressive camera movement and cinematic lighting."

As a first feature, *Formosa* presented a greater set of challenges than our previous projects. The film incorporates many production elements that low-budget films typically avoid. A period setting alone can be a recipe for production headaches, even more so when combined with complex scenes featuring a large ensemble. For Oliver, the biggest challenge was maintaining a classic Hollywood look on a shoe-string budget and tight schedule. "Everything needed to work: camera movement, set design, lighting and makeup," he says. "This wasn't a gritty, handheld drama where we could 'run and gun.' We knew the entire project



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The "before" frame is a 16x9 anamorphic native frame in DVCPro50. The "after" frame shows the same image with scratches, desaturation and film-grain filters applied and is matted to approximately 1.33:1 to emulate the 16mm films of the social-guidance era.



would be compromised if the images looked cheap or video-like. It would take the audience right out of the story."

We considered shooting on 35mm but hoped to preserve our modest budget for talent and production design rather than film stock and postproduction costs. As an early adopter of Panasonic's AG-DVX100 24p MiniDV camcorder, I was intrigued by the more advanced AJ-SDX900. Oliver and I determined via testing that the SDX900's 4:2:2 color space, native 16x9 CCD chips, and high-definition lenses would be our best option. "We felt the Panasonic was a camera that could, if treated professionally, capture footage comparable to 35mm and in line with our budget," says Oliver.

He wanted to push the digital medium as far as possible. "I'm an intuitive shooter, but I'm also technical, and I felt that if I could bring both sensibilities together I could really push the envelope on *Formosa*." Enlisting gaffer Trevor Houghton, he set out to create a lighting strategy that was both cost-effective and beautiful in the classical

Hollywood style. "There's a misconception that you don't need to light digital as much as film," he notes. "If anything, you need to be *more* careful with your lighting when shooting 24p. At the very least, you need to approach a digital project with the same attention to detail as a 35mm project."

Oliver and Houghton utilized strong backlight, hair lights, toppers, and other old-school lighting techniques to give *Formosa* a classical Hollywood feel. "Normally I use one large, soft key and minimal backlight, but this film required a different approach," says the cinematographer. "For inspiration and reference, we looked at *Bugsy* [shot by Allen Daviau, ASC] and *L.A. Confidential* [shot by Dante Spinotti, ASC, AIC]. We also watched a lot of 16mm black-and-white social-guidance films from the Fifties. I was curious to see how the camera would handle hard light because softer is usually better with video. But with minimal tweaking, the camera delivered. I think that's largely due to the SDX900's Cine Gamma curves, which are designed to mimic the response curve and exposure latitude of

film. Happily, the contrast range translated to digital in a really pleasing way."

Choosing the SDX900 also meant we could afford to rent two cameras throughout the shoot. We initially intended to use the B-camera as a backup, but before long we were rolling both cameras at least half the time. "I don't quite understand the physics of it, but two-camera coverage seems to give you an exponential amount of footage," says Oliver. "Many scenes had more than a dozen characters interacting, and we knew going in that the script would be difficult. By using two cameras, we were able to comfortably shoot the larger scenes and rack up generous amounts of additional footage." Oliver credits 1st AC Chris Shaun, who also operated the B camera, with keeping the camera department running smoothly despite a hectic pace and harsh locations that ran the gamut from chilly nights to dusty desert vistas.

Shooting digitally also allowed us to give the actors additional creative freedom. Because we were constantly rolling tape, they could experiment and improvise and be confident the editor would be able to cut their performances into coherent scenes. The actors had to be on their game at all times because we constantly moved cameras around from character to character, catching moments of spontaneity. Of course, there's a danger of overcoverage, too, and that's where 1st AD Marty Vesselich helped me set the pace properly. When I've shot 35mm, money concerns often caused me to cut at a moment's notice and maybe skip that additional take. For filmmakers like me who are just starting out, these 24p cameras are miraculous.

We shot *Formosa* in 20 days, with one week onstage in Los Angeles and the remainder on location in New Mexico. The biggest challenge on location was the film's period setting. "We couldn't afford to dress an entire street as 1951, so we'd get to a location and establish maybe a 90-degree field of view," explains Oliver. "We might have a few picture cars and a building façade

Formosa photos by Noah Kadner, courtesy of High Road Productions.

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Cinematographer Tyler Oliver (right) and 1st AC Chris Shaun prepare to shoot a background plate for the process-photography driving scenes from the back of a stakebed truck on the outskirts of Albuquerque.



as background. In staging our reverse shots, we took 'cheating' to a whole new level. As usual, the limitations forced us to find creative solutions. I remember one shot in particular where we literally had one wall to shoot against, and it was white — a cinematographer's nightmare! But we found a section of wall that had a red line painted on it, positioned the hood of a

picture car at the bottom of the frame in the foreground, and staged the actors perpendicular to the camera. We embraced the 'flat' composition instead of fighting it, and it came together with an almost Edward Hopper feel. The emotional beats in that scene happened to suit the look. Sometimes you get lucky."

To simulate 1950s-style rear

projection for driving scenes, we opted for greenscreen compositing. We also shot a scene set at a drive-in on the greenscreen stage when it proved difficult to find a vintage drive-in theater in the area. "We found a huge warehouse in New Mexico that could accommodate all the picture cars and the minimal drive-in set," says Oliver. "Trevor and his crew really rose to the challenge of quickly and beautifully lighting the greenscreen setups. The cars of the Forties and Fifties are loaded with reflective chrome and polished wood, which can be difficult to control spill on, but it worked out with careful flagging and rigging of silks." The crew shot background plates on rural roads outside Albuquerque. It was seriously thrifty, little more than a high hat strapped on the back of a stakebed truck. Luckily, we were able to use image-stabilization software in post to help smooth out the camera shake.

Formosa also features a mix of vintage and modern-day re-creations of

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Fifties social-guidance films. These movies were typically 15 minutes or less and were shot on 16mm black-and-white; they highlighted issues such as premarital sex, alcohol abuse, and cheating on tests at school. These films were part of my original inspiration for *Formosa*, so it was important to me that we re-create them in look and tone. Oliver did this by changing his lighting to a flatter, less complimentary style specifically for these scenes, which were also captured with the SDX900. "I had to fight my normal instincts and think like a social-guidance cinematographer would," he says. "That meant very static compositions, 'bad' lighting with harsh shadows, and masking the 16x9 frame to the 1.33:1 aspect of the original 16mm films." In post, the color was removed and digital dust, hair, gate-weave and scratches were added to the footage to create a reasonable facsimile of the vintage films.

The rest of the post workflow brought additional challenges and some

unexpected advantages. In addition to editing natively in 24p using Apple's Final Cut Pro, color correction in the digital realm was essentially a digital intermediate (DI) without the scanning costs. Colorist Andrew Lichtstein at Technicolor Digital Intermediates graded *Formosa* on a da Vinci 2K in just 10 hours. "I'm a child of the digital age — I grew up with Macs and Photoshop," says Oliver. "When I first discovered printer lights, I was baffled by how crude the system was. I was always asking, 'Why can't we just telecine it?' Finally, that day is here, and not just for big-budget films."

To be honest, we hope people will watch *Formosa* and assume it was shot on 35mm. Luckily, it passed the test for Oliver and me at a recent festival screening, where it was projected from DigiBeta on Christie's 2K digital projector and directly followed the screening of a 35mm feature. Our images were pin-sharp and vibrantly colorful, noticeably better than those of the 35mm



print, which was soft from edge to edge and visibly grainy and faded. After watching *Formosa* on monitors for so long, we all breathed a huge sigh of relief. ■

Red (Saginaw Grant, left) and Sven (Erik Holland) capture the action at Formosa Studio.

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An Angry Young & Man

A streetwise criminal comes of age in the South African film *Tsotsi*, photographed by Lance Gewer and directed by Gavin Hood.

by Rachael K. Bosley

Unit photography by Blid Alsbirk

Depicting a few days in the life of a young gangster on the streets of Johannesburg, *Tsotsi* is set in a world many filmmakers might have rendered with visceral camerawork, an extreme color palette and dizzying editing patterns. But the story, which comes from a novel by Athol Fugard, called for another tack. The days in question follow a carjacking that leaves the gangster, Tsotsi (Presley Chweneyagae), in possession of a newborn boy who was tucked away in the back seat when the car was stolen. Panicked over the find, Tsotsi

stows the infant in his dilapidated shack, and over the next several days, as he tries to figure out what to do, he begins grappling with an entirely new set of feelings: empathy, responsibility and remorse.

Although violence and instability pervade Tsotsi's life, the film is an intimate study of his emotional and psychological evolution, and this focus on the inner realm led director/writer Gavin Hood, who adapted Fugard's book for the screen, to offer the project to director of photography Lance Gewer, a fellow South African whose work he had admired



for some time. “Lance and I had mutual friends in the industry, and I bumped into him at the lab or the studio every so often, but I was aware of his work, particularly his early short films, before I actually met him,” says Hood. “He has a very classical eye, as well as a certain restraint that really allows the performances in the pieces he photographs to shine, and that’s very much what I needed for *Tsotsi*. I wanted to achieve a beautiful film that you only think about as beautiful after you’ve come out of the story.”

Born in Johannesburg, Gewer has honed his skills on South African film and television projects for 20 years. Although the country’s favorable weather and proximity to Europe have made it a favorite destination for commercial shoots, Gewer notes that apartheid and its complicated legacy have created an unusual training ground for aspiring cinematographers. “Working your way up the industry ladder, especially during the changes South Africa has gone through in the time I’ve been involved, is not your normal experience,” he says. “The commercial

world goes on all the time, but the feature world doesn’t necessarily. There have been eras of bad films and eras of almost no films, but there have been periods when a flux of films enabled one to learn the ropes. I was lucky to enter the industry during one of those periods, the mid-1980s, and I worked on 13 features and almost 200 commercials as a camera assistant.”

By that time, however, Gewer had left the cinematography program at Pretoria Technikon Film and Television School and was already shooting and directing independent projects. A number of these were low-budget 16mm features produced for African audiences and destined for distribution in villages and townships, where they were typically projected in people’s garages or community halls. “We shot them in three to five days with a crew of four,” he recalls. “The shoots were really quick and nasty yet were an incredible experience. It was great to shoot film and work within those limitations because that’s ultimately what filmmaking is about: making the most of what’s at your disposal.” As he

continued to compile cinematography credits, Gewer regularly returned to the industry ranks to assist, but in 1993 he decided to pursue cinematography full time. “I had to kind of leave the mainstream industry to become a cinematographer because I found that trying to work my way through the industry held me back. I’d take a step away and do what I could do, and then I’d have to find my way back in again.”

Before notching his first feature credit on *Beat the Drum* (2003), Gewer shot documentaries such as *Mapun-gubwe — Secrets of the Sacred Hill* and *White Farmers, Black Land*, and short films such as *Sacrifice* and *Come See the Bioscope* (both of which he also directed). It was Gewer’s work on short films that caught Hood’s eye at film festivals and other showcases in the region. “When I looked at Lance’s work, I felt we had a very similar way of seeing,” says the director. “I want every moment in a film to count, and I attribute that to my background in still photography, where you’re trying to capture an emotional moment. You could freeze almost any frame in

Opposite: Tsotsi (Presley Chweneyagae) scans the crowd at a train station in search of his next victim. This page: After choosing a mark, Tsotsi and his gang (from left), Boston (Mothusi Magano), Butcher (Zenzo Ngqobe) and Aap (Kenneth Nkosi), keep an eye on the man as passengers prepare to board the train.

An Angry Young Man



Above: In his shack, *Tsotsi* attempts to care for an infant that was left in his hands during a carjacking. **Below:** The smooth-talking Fela (Zola, second from left) takes advantage of *Tsotsi*'s downtime by trying to recruit Butcher and Aap to work for him.

Lance's movies and it would feel like a beautiful still that could stand on its own. That's a particular sensibility; others see the world in a much more kinetic way.

"*Tsotsi* appears to be a gangster story, but it's actually much more an intimate, coming-of-age story," Hood continues. "Tsotsi transitions from an angry young man who does some really terrible things to a young man who finally begins to know himself, and to make that transition believable

I knew I needed an actor with an extraordinary ability to communicate thoughts, and, in order to read those thoughts, a cinematographer who would light and frame and shoot so that we as director and cinematographer were not on display, but rather the performance was on display."

This emphasis on the internal led the filmmakers to develop a style so subtle that a slight, slow push in on a character has the kind of dramatic impact that is more often achieved

with a much bolder move. "The cinematography of *Tsotsi* lies in interiors, the emotional states of the characters," says Gewer. "There isn't much camera movement, and when there is a move it's always dictated by the choreography of the characters and the story. Our work was more about keeping the camera quite still, exercising restraint, studying the characters and trying to get to know them quite intimately. We worked with the emotional beats of the story, trying to



catch every nuance and implication.” Hood adds, “When people heard what *Tsotsi* was about, a number of them said, ‘You should shoot it like *City of God*,’ but stylistically our film is closer to *Central Station*, more of a one-on-one relationship movie. *City of God* is a great film and the hand-held style was appropriate for it, but *Tsotsi* is not a chaotic story apart from its opening scenes. We had to get the audience right into Tsotsi’s mind, and he’s initially somebody most viewers feel is very different from them. I didn’t want to use handheld because I didn’t want the audience to feel we were in the room, documenting; I didn’t want to look at the character in a *vérité* way.”

One of the first decisions the filmmakers made was to shoot in Super 35mm. Gewer explains, “Gavin’s intention was to make an intensely emotional and engaging psychological thriller set in a world of contrasts — love and hate, wealth and poverty, revenge and forgiveness, anger and compassion — and widescreen was the only way we could visually tell that story. We needed to get a sense of the characters in the space and the broadness of that space; it’s a world vulnerable people inhabit.” Noting that the production’s original budget was even more modest than the final one of \$3 million, he adds, “We didn’t have enough money to shoot widescreen, but the producers [Peter Fudakowski and Paul Raleigh] went out and raised it. They were behind us all the way.”

Most of *Tsotsi* was filmed with a single camera, a Moviecam Compact, and Zeiss Variable Prime lenses. Gewer also used Angenieux 5:1 17-102mm and 10:1 25-250mm zooms and a Canon 400mm prime, but the Variable Primes carried the day. “Our shoot was about eight weeks, and the Variable Primes helped us save time,” he notes. “Instead of physically moving the camera you can slightly reframe the



The camera moves behind a colored-glass mobile to assume Tsotsi’s point of view as he watches Miriam (Terry Pheto) nurse his new charge.

shot, and if you’re tracking with an actor you can push in during the movement and disguise a zoom.” He cites his focus puller, Pam Laxen, for her excellence in the field. “Pam has worked on about 50 features and is an incredibly good assistant. We shot roughly 80 percent of *Tsotsi* at night, and we were shooting wide open. We were always taking the stop right down for extra depth. Pam copes with this situation extremely well and is also very good at running the space around the camera for me; she helps others do what they need to do in an un-chaotic way.”

The filmmakers occasionally worked from Hood’s rough story-

boards, which the director describes as “bad *South Park* drawings” intended to indicate “what the emotional beats of the scene are.” He elaborates, “I had a lot to say about the angles because I feel the way you photograph an actor has a huge impact on the emotion conveyed by his performance. There’s a time when you know you want to be in tight and a time you really want to back off; that decision is emotional, and out of that decision you then compose the image to be also beautiful. I talk with my cinematographer a lot about framing and composition because that to me is part of the emotional core of the storytelling. On *Tsotsi*, we

An Angry Young Man

Right: Setting up a crane move that will track the gang as it leaves Tsotsi's shack are director of photography Lance Gewer (foreground), gaffer Oliver Wilter (center) and key grip Ari Stavrinou. Below: In preparation for the shot, Gewer checks the light on the actors.



avored being very wide or pretty tight. There's not much in between."

Tsotsi was shot mostly on location in Kliptown, Soweto, during South Africa's winter. When Gewer began scouting the area, he found himself on some of the same streets he had haunted while filming low-budget features two decades earlier. "In those days, we'd drive around and look for a suitable location — something that could pose as a hospital or police station, for example — and when we found one we'd transform it a bit and just start filming. By chance, we ended up using many of the same sites for *Tsotsi*, and they hadn't really changed."

As they developed their lighting scheme, Gewer and his gaffer, Oliver Wilter, took their cues from the locations, which included an urban train station, a middle-class suburb, and the impoverished township on the outskirts of the city. "The lighting in those areas is all very different," notes Gewer. "The townships have a mix of sodium and mercury light — oranges and greens — radiating from the big security lights that illuminate these large



areas. Even today, many people still don't have electricity in their homes, so they use oil lamps, candles and coal fires inside. We looked at *8 Mile* for the way it made use of mixed lighting; we wanted that kind of texture, as gritty a feel as we could achieve. Tsotsi is an antihero, and we felt it was very important to be honest to the character. We used a lot of sodium and mercury bulbs in practicals on set, but we used them mostly in the background while keeping the skin tones clean and natural.

"Oliver and I have done quite a few productions together, and he and his team were incredible," Gewer continues. "We were working very fast and usually at night, and we didn't have Wendy lights or helium balloons, so we lit really big night exteriors with 18K and 12K HMIs, 20K incandescents, and 6K and 4K CinePars that were mounted on high riser stands and kept as far from the subject as possible. This gave us quite an interesting, contrasty effect. The terrain — the fields, the grass and the roads — became quite gritty as opposed to soft."

The film's largest setup was a night exterior that appears early in the film, after Tsotsi has savagely beaten

one of his friends, Boston (Mothusi Magano), at a neighborhood bar. After Tsotsi runs out of the bar, the camera picks him up and follows him through a dark alley, then down through a river and out across a large, grassy expanse that separates his township from a distant suburb. "We combined two shots to achieve this and used a disguised wipe/dissolve so it would appear as one shot," says

Gewer. "For the first part of the shot, we used a Steadicam [operated by Deon Vermeulen] to follow Tsotsi as he runs into shot and down a narrow alley between the shacks. At the end of the alley, the camera loses sight of him for a moment and wipes over a sheet of corrugated iron, where we dissolve to the next shot. The second shot was done with my operator, Marc Brower, using an Arri geared

After a thought-provoking encounter with a homeless man near the train station, Tsotsi heads back to the township for the night. For most of the picture, the filmmakers strove to keep the character dead center in the frame, "as though he's on a track he can't get off of," says director Gavin Hood. Left: Gewer and Hood discuss their next shot.



An Angry Young Man

Right: Taken by Gewer with his mobile phone during a location scout, this photo of a butchery in Kliptown inspired a lighting motif that appears throughout *Tsotsi* in several variations. Dubbed “butcher’s pink,” the motif underscores Tsotsi’s growing awareness of what’s missing from his life. Below: “Butcher’s pink” enlivens the look of Miriam’s shack as Tsotsi watches her bathe his infant.



right from the alley, where we used a lot of small [150-watt, 300-watt, 650-watt, 1K and 2K] incandescents — as well as a few small HMIs for ‘moon-light’ — out to the big field, which we illuminated with a variety of HMIs, CinePars and 20K incandescents.”

While scouting in the township, Gewer came upon a lighting motif that he decided to use throughout the picture to subtly underscore Tsotsi’s psychological state. “While driving around Kliptown at night, we came across a little butchery that was set apart by its green and pink fluorescent lighting. This inspired a recurring theme in our lighting. It’s quite subtle, but you’ll notice a hint of pink light in the background of many shots — we called it ‘butcher’s pink.’ I think of it as a suggestion of the love and compassion Tsotsi yearns for in his harsh world.” It was quite a challenge to get the pale-pink hue to register on film, however. “It’s a difficult color to work with and needed to be carefully exposed and timed to read right on film, even down to the projector lamp; if the lamp was too bright, it would cause the pink to read as an off-white pink. On set, I found myself using two or three times more

head on a [31-foot] Giraffe crane. It begins by wiping over the same sheet of corrugated iron [to accommodate the dissolve] and climbs into the air to reveal Tsotsi running away from the camera. He runs down a hill, through a river, up the embankment on the other side, and across a massive, burnt field toward the suburb in the distance.

“As he runs across the field, it begins to rain; we used two rain machines in the foreground to create the effect. This shot was done around midnight on one of the coldest nights of the year, and the water from the rain machine froze as it landed! I was using Kodak’s Vision2 500T [5218], which I rated at [ISO] 400, and lit the scene to about T2. We had to light





gels on the sources than I expected to just to get it to read.”

One example of the “butcher’s pink” motif can be seen in a night-exterior wide shot in which Tsotsi follows a wheelchair-bound homeless man under a highway bridge. Many practical fixtures were used in the shot, and one is a fluorescent fixture that casts pale-pink light on a wall far behind the action. “On the wall, we placed practical fluorescent tubes gelled with two sheets of Lee Flesh Pink and enough ND filtration to sufficiently dim the color so it would read as pink on film rather than blown-out white,” says Gewer. “We supplemented this with a 5K Fresnel gelled with two layers of Flesh Pink to create the pink falloff on the wall under the fluorescent light. I believe we also added some CTO to enhance the color. We shot this scene on 5218 and exposed it at T2 to capture the existing lights and natural ambience of the city. To suggest the isolation of the characters in the vast and threatening space, I used 10mm and 14mm lenses for wide shots and long lenses for full shots and close-ups.”

Another place where “butcher’s pink” appears is in the

shack belonging to Miriam (Terry Pheto), a young woman in the township. After spotting her with her own baby, Tsotsi follows her home and forces her at gunpoint to help care for his. Though their relationship is initially antagonistic, he is drawn back to her home because it exudes everything that is missing from his life. “Miriam’s shack had to suggest a

little nest, a place that had the elements Tsotsi was searching for in life: love, compassion and normality,” says Gewer. “We built the interiors of Miriam’s and Tsotsi’s shacks on a stage, and [production designer] Emilia Weavind and the art department did a fantastic job of it. That’s where we had most of the scenes with the baby, and Gavin wanted to be able

Above: A hint of “butcher’s pink” is cast on the background wall as Tsotsi tracks a wheelchair-bound homeless man underneath a bridge. Below: Gewer prepares for one of the film’s many night exteriors.



An Angry Young Man

Ensconced in his shack, Tsotsi contemplates his options. “Presley is quite a unique character, and I’ve never worked with an actor like him,” Gewer says of Chweneyagae, who had never been in a film before. “He was always in character, but it didn’t distract him when someone talked to him; he did to a T what we asked him to do, and he did it without losing character.”



to work very closely with the actors on those scenes.”

Miriam’s shack features pale blue walls and curtains, and the “butcher’s pink” is created by sunlight coming through a window made of pink glass. “Homes in the townships are made of materials other people have disposed of, so you see lots of corrugated metal and window frames with glass that isn’t the norm,” notes Gewer. “Miriam’s and Tsotsi’s shacks had to suggest that homemade quality. Her shack is warmer and a lot more colorful than his, partly because of the colored-glass mobiles she has made for her baby. For day scenes in her shack we filled in with soft

sources and incandescent lamps through the windows, and we placed different colored glass in some of the frames.”

In Tsotsi’s shack, Weavind limited the color palette to rusts and reds. “Emilia, Lance and I talked quite a bit about how to get into Tsotsi’s mind without using voiceover,” says Hood. “I really wanted to feel every flicker of thought in his head, which meant the audience had to focus on the actor as rapidly as possible in every scene. We chose to strip down the interior [of his shack] and use three or four shades of the same color. Similarly, the only color he wears apart from black is red.

Everything is designed to not pull you out of what’s going on in his head.” Lighting Tsotsi’s shack “was about creating another world, a world in which this character lives but loves very little,” says Gewer. “It also had to suggest a haven, a place where he feels safe, secure and in control. It’s the place where he comes to terms with himself, and the lighting changes a lot from scene to scene according to his mood. I feel lighting can be quite imaginary in that sense — it’s sometimes about creating what’s in the mind of the character as well as suggesting reality. We had to get at what each scene was about: is Tsotsi feeling vulnerable or secure?”

“In the moodier scenes, the shack is dark except for a single candle on the table that appears to light Tsotsi’s face — I used 150-watt incandescent lamps to re-create that feel — and shafts of light created by several HMIs coming through little holes in the corrugated-metal walls,” continues the cinematographer. “Depending on the time of day, we also used smoke. People in the townships make coal and wood fires every day at about 4 a.m. and then again in the afternoon, thousands and thousands of fires. In winter you can hardly breathe, let alone see more than 30 meters in front of you, because of the smoke these fires create.”

Throughout the shoot, Gewer used a 150-watt Pepper as an eyelight for Chweneyagae, who appears in almost every scene. “If anything was my brief, that was it: we had to see Presley’s eyes at all times. His eyes are the world of the story. We kept the Pepper’s intensity very low. All it had to do was twinkle in his eyes to bring them out.”

Tsotsi was finished with a digital intermediate (DI) at The Video Lab in Johannesburg, but the decision to do a digital grade wasn’t made until after the shoot got underway. “Video Lab was considering bringing in a [Discreet] Lustre, but it didn’t

become a certainty until after we'd started shooting," says Gewer. "When they got the Lustre we ran some tests, and for me it was quite a tossup. Gavin and I both felt the footage that was timed photochemically was technically superior, but we knew what we stood to lose if we didn't do a DI. We wouldn't have been able to effect shots the way we did, and we wouldn't have been able to give the picture the same consistent grade." Hood adds, "From the producing/delivery point of view, we thought the DI would be helpful in the event *Tsotsi* sold around the world. We were shooting in widescreen and had to deliver multiple versions, including an HD 16x9 version, a 4x3 version, and subtitled and non-subtitled versions. In all there were about nine versions of the film, and when you can store all nine versions in the digital world, it makes your file delivery that much easier."

Nevertheless, Gewer embarked on the shoot with a photochemical finish in mind. "We shot the film as though it would be finished on film, and that forced us to be quite disciplined during the shoot," says the cinematographer. "We achieved the look we wanted [on the negative] and enhanced some scenes, especially in *Tsotsi*'s shack, during the digital grade." The DI also enabled Gewer to even out South Africa's harsh, topky sunlight on day exteriors. "We often darkened the foreground to achieve greater depth in the image so the eye would travel off into the distance. We didn't use many filters on the lens."

Hood notes that the DI was particularly helpful for a tricky exterior that was shot in waning light. In the scene, *Tsotsi* takes the baby to one of his childhood homes, a set of large, concrete construction pipes on the outskirts of the township. The pipes are inhabited by several young orphans who approach *Tsotsi* with a mix of curiosity and suspicion. "We had to shoot that scene in a single afternoon, and it's full of little chil-

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An Angry Young Man



Gewer and 1st AC Pam Laxen share a laugh between takes.

dren who'd never been on camera before," says Hood. "In fact, some were orphans who actually lived in and around the area. We had to get wide shots, close-ups and reverses, and the sun was going down. It's the kind of scene you would shoot over two or three days if you had the budget, but we had to get it in about five hours between midday and sunset. Lance was under enormous

pressure to maintain the feel of late-afternoon light for the whole scene, and he did a brilliant job. We got the wide shots with great, late-afternoon horizon views that give the scene depth; then, as the sun slowly disappeared, we framed to keep the sky out of some remaining close-ups and Lance kept giving us light, knowing that as long as the scene was well lit and well exposed he would be able to manipulate it [in post]. He filled in with reflectors and then, when the sun was actually gone, with two 18Ks. There's no doubt the original images would have held up, but the DI was a marvelous tool for bringing lighting continuity to that scene."

The production's footage was processed by The Film Lab, The Video Lab's sister facility, and was subsequently scanned at 2K on a Spirit DataCine. Gewer spent about four weeks in the DI suite with Hood and Brett Manson, a dedicated Lustre

colorist, but the team, which was working from a hi-def monitor, had to start from scratch after the initial film-outs revealed inaccuracies in the look-up tables. "We'd had DVD dailies telecined at 2K [by The Video Lab] throughout the shoot, and even though focus wasn't critical and the color rendition wasn't accurate, they proved to be a very good reference during the grading process," says Gewer. "When problematic shots arose in the grade, Gavin and I knew what the negative really looked like because we'd seen the rushes.

"The grade took 12 weeks altogether, and after setting the look with Gavin and Brett, I had to move on to another project," he continues. "Because of limited storage we couldn't have all the reels up at one time, but we eventually got to the point where we could do four at a time. It was the first DI carried out on the Lustre in South Africa, and Brett

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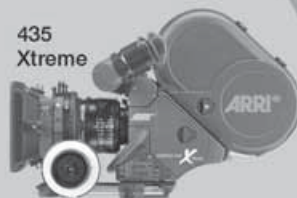


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did amazingly well. Seeing the process through from film to the digital domain; integrating all the effects, titles and subtitles; and then recording out to film was a big test." The color-corrected files were transferred to 35mm with a Kodak Lightning 11 Laser Recorder. Festival prints were made on Kodak Vision Premier 2393, and general-release prints were made on Vision 2383.

Tsotsi made its U.S. debut last fall at the AFI Fest, and Miramax Films began releasing it in the States late last month. It was South Africa's submission for this year's Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and Gewer was recently invited to discuss his work at the Camerimage Film Festival, where *Tsotsi* was screened in competition with 14 other features from around the world. "Many of us who worked on *Tsotsi* had been in the industry for a long time, searching for a film like

this," he says. "When it came around, we just knew — we didn't know how great it would be or that it would achieve what it has achieved, we just knew it would be a great film to make. It's an opportunity I'm completely thankful for and humbled by.

"It was definitely the most difficult film I've ever done, but also the most rewarding," continues Gewer. "Every setup was intense emotionally; there were no cutaways or simple establishing shots. Fortunately, the actors were incredibly good, our producers had real respect for the medium and didn't hold us back, and our director had a very strong visual sense and knew how to tell a story collaboratively. The movie required of all of us everything we had to give, and making it had a profound effect on everyone. The spirit and energy were tangible every minute we were on set; one didn't

have to look through the camera to feel it. We knew we were making a really good film that would be important for a long time to come." ■

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Heart and Soul



Ellen Kuras, ASC captures Neil Young in concert at Nashville's historic Ryman Auditorium.

by John Pavlus

Unit photography by Ken Regan
Additional photos by Ellen Kuras

When friendly locals in the village of Nyack, New York, shoot the breeze, it might lead to a game of cards or a backyard barbecue. But when the locals are Ellen Kuras, ASC and director Jonathan Demme, it can lead to a once-in-a-lifetime collaboration with a legendary recording artist. Such was the genesis of the concert film *Neil Young: Heart of Gold*, which Kuras filmed in Nashville's historic Ryman Auditorium last fall. "Jonathan was kind enough to loan me a room in his editing suite in Nyack for two months, and he and I often talked over coffee," recalls Kuras. "One day, during one of those chats, I said, 'I'm such a huge fan of Neil Young,

It'd be great to have an opportunity to work with him someday.' A week later, Jonathan called and asked if I'd like to work with him on a concert film with Neil Young! Jonathan's the kind of person and director who puts things into action right away."

Demme, of course, is no stranger to concert films, having created one of the genre's contemporary classics, *Stop Making Sense* (1984). Shot by Jordan Cronenweth, ASC, that film famously eschewed audience cutaways and other conventional coverage in favor of a more stylized approach to its subjects, The Talking Heads. Although *Heart of Gold* marks Kuras' first foray into rock-concert cinematography, she had recently worked in

the live-performance arena for *Block Party*, Michel Gondry's quasi-documentary performance portrait of comedian Dave Chappelle, and was able to bring that experience to bear on Demme's film. Their collaboration turned out to be a "concert film" in name only, fusing grand aesthetic flourishes with disarming intimacy to pay tribute to the famous Ryman Auditorium and the musician Kuras calls "one of the greatest musical, political and spiritual inspirations I've ever had."

The director of photography on such films as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (see AC April '04), *Blow* (AC March '01) and *Summer of Sam* (AC June '99), Kuras earned plaudits for her work in digital video



on the features *Personal Velocity* (AC April '02) and *Bamboozled*, but she took a determinedly analog approach to *Heart of Gold*, shooting in Super 16mm. "A lot of the mikes and monitors in the Neil Young world are analog. He uses old instruments that have an distinctive timbre, a roundness to their sound," she says. "In a way, some of my work has been in the same vein — I still used the old [Eastman EXR 200T] 5293 stock when [Vision 200T] 5274 became available — so I was very excited to keep the feeling of this concert within the analog world." She didn't use 5293 this time, but she did choose another Kodak stock, the high-speed Vision2 500T 7218, to wring the maximum range out of low light. "Neil is ultra-sensitive to bright light, so I didn't want to blind him. Super 16 is so good now that I knew we'd be fine with the digital blowup, yet I knew it would still be a struggle to get a good stop."

The tough stop was exacerbated by the production's zoom-heavy lens package; at T3.5, some of the zooms were considerably slower than their corresponding prime lengths. "And I knew I didn't want to shoot the older 35mm Angenieux zoom lenses wide open," adds Kuras. "The real sweet spot is closer to a T4, although the Optimas still perform spectacularly at T2.8." Her 35mm optics, which she chose "not only for their clarity but also for their throw, because there wasn't enough stop to put extenders on Super 16 lenses," included three 24-290mm Angenieux Optimas [equivalent to 48-580mm in

Super 16] and three 25-250mm [50-500mm in Super 16] Angenieux HRs. "I was lucky to get those Optimas — thanks to Charlie Tammaro at CSC — because we were on a tight budget."

"The Ryman was formerly a tabernacle church, and given that it's such a small venue, we had ordered a number of moving lights to save space so we wouldn't have to hang 10 lights for different focus positions or color," she continues. When it came time to rig the Ryman's lighting grid, Kuras was compelled to reconsider using gelled tungsten Par cans rather than the electronic moving lights, which comprised 32

dichroic glass wedges. "I was very particular about the difference because color doesn't feel as deep or round when it's electronically generated," says Kuras. "I even asked a person to stand onstage and lit half his face with a gelled Par can and the other half with a moving light, and I found the feeling just wasn't the same." Fortunately, John Nadeau, Kuras' longtime gaffer, came to the rescue. With less than two days left before showtime, Nadeau proposed replacing most of the moving lights with Par cans and Lekos. Kuras admits she was slightly incredulous at first. "I looked at him cross-eyed and said, 'Can we really afford that

Opposite: An overview of the stage shows the effect of a carefully lit, richly hued backdrop. Ellen Kuras, ASC says the intention was to create the feel of "a series of paintings within a painting." This page, top: Close-ups provide an intimate view of the performer. Below: Bathed in an orange glow, Young belts out a tune.



Heart and Soul



Above: The use of varied backdrops and lighting cues allowed the filmmakers to create a diverse array of looks for the concerts. Below: Young performs "Falling off the Face of the Earth."

kind of time?' At that point, we had just two more hours till the band would come in to rehearse. But John said, 'I know how important this film is to you, and you'll live with it for the rest of your life, so why not do what your intuition says?' So for the next two hours, the electricians just went crazy. I can't tell you how relieved I was when I saw the difference it made the next morning."

By that time, Kuras and Nadeau had just 36 hours to design and light the entire 20-song concert.

This task was no small feat, given the layered visual concept Demme had conceived with Kuras, which involved massive, richly hued backdrops sliding in and out behind the musicians "like a series of paintings within a painting." However, the filmmakers were eager to visually reference the Ryman's storied musical history, even at the expense of simpler logistics. "When the Ryman used to do old radio concerts, the backdrops were advertisements for whomever was sponsoring the

show," explains Kuras. "Our show wasn't an advertisement, but [the backdrops] lent so much to the film thanks to Michael Zansky's paintbrush. They're like landscapes of memory, which echoes the Canadian prairie/childhood Neil sings about, without being literal. We wanted each song to be like a painting within a painting."

In further homage to the Ryman's radio-show tradition, Demme moved the musicians around the stage for every song. In





the old days, musicians would shuffle around in a similar fashion while waiting their turns at the mike. “I couldn’t just use the same lights in the same spots for the bass player or background singers,” says Kuras. “In addition to being quite a lighting challenge, the dynamic choreography was an invaluable learning experience about the spatial relationships of sound and how musicians work together.” But the old concerts had at least one element in common that made Kuras’ job slightly easier: they all used stage footlights. “Those were our secret light source; they meant we had consistently perfect eyelight for Neil.”

Kuras and her crew toiled for 20 hours straight the day before the show, grabbed six hours of rest, and then began again at 6 the following morning, continuing “literally until the curtain opened.” Lighting 20 song-scenes in one sustained burst “was about serious intuition,” laughs the cinematographer. Of course, it also helped to have a lighting-board operator, Steve Leiberman, who “was programming all the cues in at lightning speed.” That particular skill, Kuras adds wryly, helped avert a near-catastrophe just before showtime: “When we started shooting, we had the front lights up but for-

got the cue to put the lights on behind the curtain! So all of a sudden we were frantically trying to reset that cue so the musicians could see what they were doing behind the curtain before it opened. Steve’s fingers were going like wildfire.”

“I started prep on the film after Ellen had been living with the album for weeks,” recalls Nadeau, “and in our first conversation, we both gravitated to the mood of the song ‘Falling off the Face of the Earth.’ Ellen described the feeling as ‘the very last ray of light before an eclipse.’ What imagery. We ended up with a deep-blue horizon background, which silhouetted the band,

Kuras, a longtime admirer of Young’s music, says the performer was intent on celebrating the Ryman’s history while also reflecting upon his own life experiences.



Heart and Soul



Above: Kuras (seated, front) and Young pose with several other members of the camera crew (standing, from left): operator Jack Donnelly, 1st AC Peter Morello, 1st AC Jay Feather, operator Charlie Libin, 1st AC Dave Mellow, operator Peter Agliata (partially visible), operator Alison Kelly, and 1st AC Kip McDonald. Seated next to Kuras is Rick Gioia, her 1st AC. Right: Kuras goes over some details with the crew.

and a skid/book light — a Leko going into a reflector through Opal diffusion — for Neil.”

A Los Angeles lighting designer, Jeff Ravitz, was brought in to help Kuras with the unique problem of mounting a concert. Ravitz specializes in concerts and awards shows and had worked with Demme on *The Manchurian*

Candidate, lighting the massive convention scene. “Jeff was fantastic, especially in helping us pick out music cues to accentuate the lighting and giving advice on moving lights and specific units we weren’t accustomed to using,” says Kuras. “He helped us tailor the look so it would translate as a stage show as well as for nine cameras.”

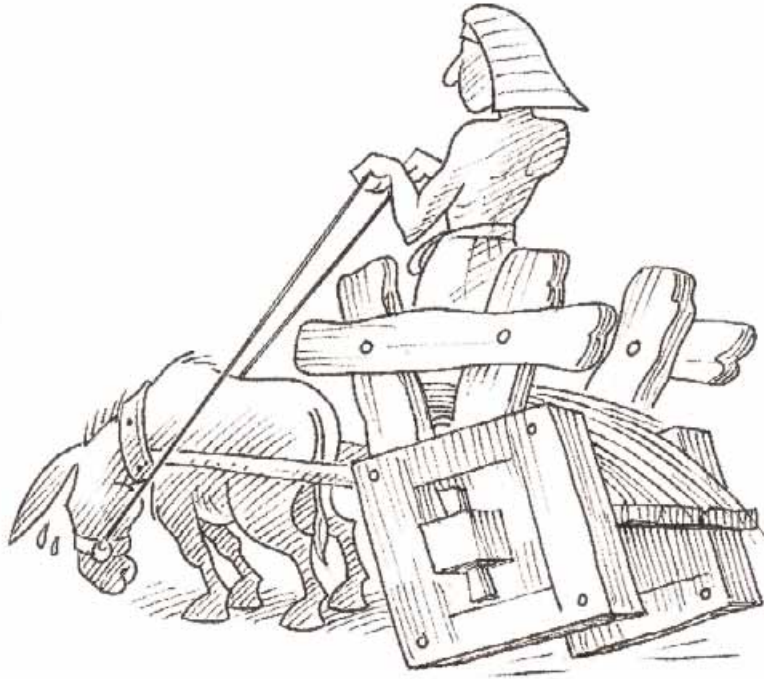


Kuras strove for a stylized approach, but unlike *Stop Making Sense*, which was assembled from takes captured over several concerts, *Heart of Gold* is a record of just two performances. Although nine Arri SR-3 cameras ensured a variety of compositions, Kuras’ lighting couldn’t possibly be tailored to all of them. “In the end, John [Nadeau] and I decided that our ‘series of paintings’ concept meant we should light for the wide shots rather than the close-ups. We also had to accept that having cameras covering 360 degrees meant we would sometimes be fully lit on the camera side. But the close-ups from the two wing cameras were terrific because we were able to capture an intimacy.”

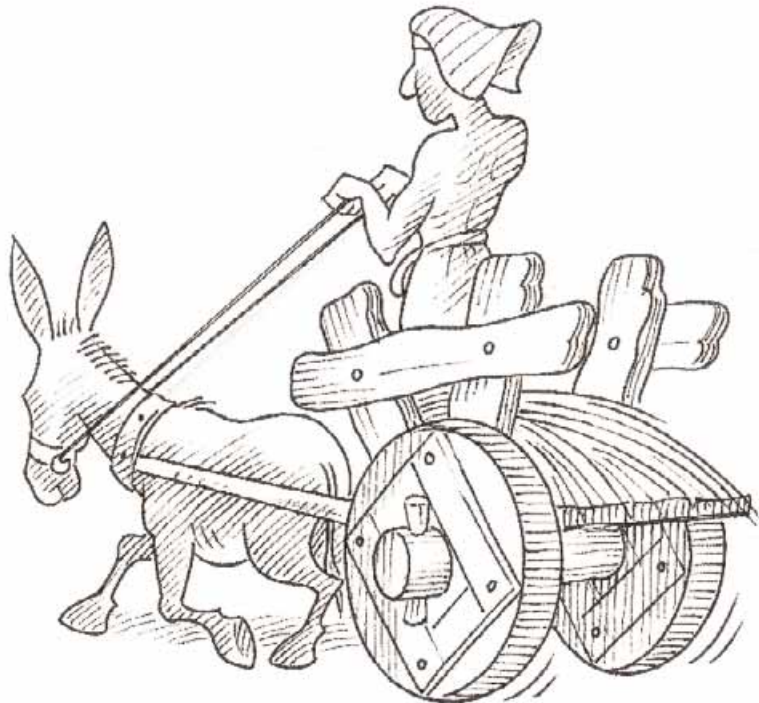
Choreographing the positions and framing of the nine cameras was actually the last element of *Heart of Gold* to come together. During a two-week prep, Demme and Kuras plotted out compositions for seven cameras, but they later decided to order two more in order to give more attention to the background musicians. “Originally Jonathan said he wanted 80 percent of the movie to be about Neil,” says Kuras, “but one of the things I love about the film is that Jonathan chose to highlight some of the musicians you’d never see in a concert film. To be able to see the bass player and his little idiosyncratic movements is fantastic.” At one point, the movie even awards a roadie his close-up as he carries off one of Young’s guitars during a scene change and then stands in the wings, enjoying the next song.

Eight of the camera positions were to be fixed, while a Steadicam roved the stage and wings throughout the performance. However, Demme’s desire to establish musical relationships in the frame spurred Kuras to mount four of the fixed cameras, including two in the wings, on dollies. “Jonathan really wanted to show the relationship between

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Kuras covers a talking point with director Jonathan Demme.



Neil and the horns, or Neil and the background singers, so we had to be able to move the cameras slightly to reframe, given that the blocking

changed from song to song. The rest of the cameras were placed on platforms in the audience, just below Neil's eyeline." Demme also dis-

cussed framing with the eight other camera operators — ASC member Declan Quinn, Chris Norr, Charlie Libin, Alison Kelly, Tony Janelli, Peter Agliata, Jack Donnelly, and Mark Schmidt — as well as Steadicam operator Kyle Rudolph. The crew had just one camera run-through during the concert's final dress rehearsal.

Very long takes were a given for covering the musicians' continuous performance, and Kuras' crew outfitted most of the camera magazines with 800' loads. Demme also wanted continuous coverage of Young throughout the show, so using the dress rehearsal as a reference, camera assistant Rick Gioia conferred with the film's editors to devise staggered coverage that would prevent rollouts from occurring during key moments. "A couple of the cameras started rolling a few minutes before the concert even

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started, just to make sure we would be covered within the staggered system," says Kuras.

Bookending the concert are two interludes that establish the film's themes of simplicity and intimacy. *Heart of Gold* begins with a grainy, handheld view of Nashville's modest skyline from the window of a moving car, and then proceeds into a suite of *vérité*-style interviews (also conducted from the passenger seat of a car) with individual musicians as they converge on the Ryman to unload their instruments. With Kuras' encouragement, Demme filmed all of this material himself on MiniDV. "He really wanted to be the only one in the car with the musicians, so I just set [the camera] up as much as I could and said, 'Godspeed.' At the time, I was in the middle of trying to get all the lighting organized, so I certainly had my hands full. We laughed together

when I asked to see *his* dailies!"

What plays out over the film's closing credits is a coda comprising nothing but Young, a guitar and an empty auditorium. "Jonathan envisioned this moment to happen immediately after the last audience member left the Ryman," says Kuras. "I didn't have time to light it as a separate piece, so I ran around and turned off lights." Although three cameras were hastily set up onstage, the song plays out in a single, uninterrupted take. Facing the empty seats and framed by the Ryman's magnificent painted windows, Young strums an abbreviated version of "Old Laughing Lady" before packing up and exiting the building.

Young was so impressed with Kuras' work that he has since asked her to light his performances on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* and *Saturday Night Live*. "Working with both Jonathan and Neil was the

chance of a lifetime," says the cinematographer. "Both men have greatly influenced my creative, personal and professional life, and I was ready to do whatever it took to make this film the best I could. I was thrilled to have an opportunity to work with both of them." ■

TECHNICAL SPECS

1.85:1
Super 16mm

Arri SR-3
Canon 16mm lenses;
Angenieux 35mm lenses

Kodak Vision2 500T 7218

Digital Intermediate

Printed on Fuji F-CP 3513DI

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A woman with dark, wavy hair and bangs is posing on a gold tufted sofa. She is wearing a black lace bra, black lace shorts, black thigh-high stockings with lace detailing, and black high-heeled shoes. She is smiling and looking back over her shoulder at the camera. The background features a gold tufted wall and a gold curtain.

Retro Sexy

Cinematographer Mott Hupfel re-creates the visual essence of the 1950s for *The Notorious Bettie Page*, which details the life and times of an erotic icon.

by John Calhoun

Unit photography by John Walsh

As she demonstrated with the films *I Shot Andy Warhol* and *American Psycho*, Mary Harron is not a director lacking in stylistic vision. For her latest project, *The Notorious Bettie Page*, she wanted to construct a time capsule of the 1950s. “Mary’s idea was that you would feel for a moment that this is an old movie from the Fifties that we’d found and are showing to you,” says director of photography Mott Hupfel. “That led us into decisions we were advised against but fought for valiantly.” Shooting in black-and-white for the bulk of the movie, which charts Page’s brief, infamous career as an S&M pinup girl and stag-film star, wasn’t in itself a controversial decision, but the filmmakers’ insistence on using black-and-white negative was considered risky. The picture’s occasional shifts to vivid color further complicated technical matters, as did Harron and Hupfel’s attempts to avoid any kind of digital finish. Their visual scheme was nothing if not ambitious, especially given the project’s \$6 million budget.

But the duo considered their ambitions crucial to capturing the distinct vibe of the period, and of a culture that considered the spectacle of a wholesome-looking American girl in a black pageboy haircut and bondage gear so scandalous. *The Notorious Bettie Page* follows the erotic icon (played by Gretchen Mol) from her youth in Nashville, through her career as a New York photo model and eventual target of a 1955 U.S. Senate investigation into pornography, and her fade into contented obscurity at the end of the decade.

Prior to *The Notorious Bettie Page*, Hupfel had only one high-profile feature to his credit: the black-and-white picture *The American Astronaut*, which brought him an Independent Spirit Award nomination in 2002. The New York University film-school graduate



Opposite: Pinup model Bettie Page (Gretchen Mol) strikes a playful pose. **This page, top:** Photographer Paula Klaw (Lili Taylor) and her husband, Irving, recruit Bettie as a fetish model. **Bottom:** Bettie also catches the eye of Miami-based photographer Bunny Yeager (Sarah Paulson).

Retro Sexy

Right: The demure, guileless Bettie waits to testify at Senate hearings probing the impact of pornography on the nation's youth, where some of her fetish photos serve as prime examples. Below: Page takes charge.



spent much of the 1990s assisting cinematographers Lee Daniel and Mike Spiller before breaking out on his own with music videos and documentaries. “Mary and her husband watched *American Astronaut*,” says Hupfel, “and her husband said, ‘You should check this guy out.’ I think she was reluctant, but we met and really got along. At the end of the meeting, I said, ‘It’s going to be hard to get me [approved] for this because I haven’t done very many movies,’ but she said, ‘Don’t be so sure.’ I soon learned that when Mary says something will happen, it will happen.”

Filming on location in New York was another non-negotiable

issue for Harron. “I don’t think Mary would have gone anywhere else,” says Hupfel, who is based in the city. “She’s Canadian and she’s not one to say no to Canada, but she was very adamant about telling this story in New York.” The storefront studio where Bettie did much of her work for Irving Klaw (Chris Bauer) and his sister, Paula (Lili Taylor), was recreated in a Bleecker Street location, and the production also ventured to other areas in Greenwich Village, where Page took acting lessons, and the beach at Coney Island, where she posed for her first photos. “Trying to find locations in New York where there isn’t a single modern amenity is impossible,” notes Hupfel. “On the beach at Coney Island, we’d move the camera four feet in one direction so that the streetlight a mile away would be hidden behind a tree branch.”

The film’s production schedule ran 32 days, with a week in Miami at the end of the shoot. (Scenes set in Tennessee were shot in Haverstraw, New Jersey.) Several weeks of prep gave Hupfel time to conduct tests and determine the best approach for the monochrome visuals. “Mary and I talked about black-and-white movies we liked, and our main references were old Sam Fuller movies like *Pickup on South Street* and *Underworld, U.S.A.* Other movies we looked at were Buñuel’s *Wuthering Heights*, for the formality, and Fassbinder’s *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant*, for the fetishization of shoes.”

But the Fuller films, particularly *Pickup on South Street*, remained the primary point of reference. “It’s the period and the [visual] economy,” explains Hupfel. “In terms of lighting, those movies weren’t really classic, super-contrasty black-and-white; they were kind of overlit. I tried to keep some of that [quality].” Possibly responding to a remote quality that he and Harron found appropriate for their story, as



well as an air of tawdriness that echoed Page's work, Hupfel saw something else while watching the Fuller movies: "I think we were looking at old prints or mediocre video transfers. The windows were blown out in a certain way, and I tried to put some of that into the movie so it's almost like you're watching an old, bad print of a movie. I worked really hard to make sure all the windows and lamps and reflections on floors burned out just a bit more than they should. We used a lot of diffusion, we pushed the film stock, and we did all sorts of things to make it look slightly degraded."

The studio's initial suggestion that the filmmakers shoot on color stock and pull the color out in a digital intermediate (DI) was rejected because Harron believed the result would not look enough like the Fifties. Yet because *Bettie Page* includes color sequences, printing on black-and-white was never a realistic option. "Woody Allen [and Gordon Willis, ASC] did it on *Zelig* — cutting A and B rolls of black-and-white and color," says Hupfel. "It can be done, but it gets really complicated. Not all theaters have the dual-system sound that's necessary to project it. Also, it would have been necessary to splice black-and-white into color in some instances, and HBO [Picturehouse] was concerned about sending prints full of splices all over the country, which is understandable. It was always in the back of my mind that we were going to get a black-and-white print for festivals, but we never did."

The testing process did examine all options. "We tested every possible scenario," says the director of photography. "We tested five different film stocks, we pushed and pulled, and we developed it and digitally graded it every possible way with different filters to come up with what Mary wanted." Eventually, they settled on Eastman



Plus-X 5231, pushed two stops, as their camera negative. "Then I used different diffusion filters, Tiffen Black Pro-Mist 1/8 to 1/2, depending on the tone of the scene, to help the lights bloom and take the edge off the grain we picked up by pushing the stock. We had to get the different blooms just right in order to make the images feel like an old, crappy version of *Pickup on South Street*."

Hupfel notes that he used Plus-X pushed two stops on *The American Astronaut*, "but because that movie was printed on black-and-white, it has a grittier feel. Once you print to color film, everything

gets smoothed out." To cut down on the contrast added by printing to color, Hupfel and his gaffer, Timothy Berg, used "an absurd amount of fill light," says the cinematographer. "Everyone on set thought it was too much, but I'd done the test and had figured out the math. It was normal black-and-white lighting — a lot of direct light and not a lot of bounce — but with a lot of fill light. On color exteriors, there was an 18K HMI over the camera all the time, sometimes two."

When photographing Mol, Hupfel used old Mitchell B and C

Bettie enjoys a moment of romance on a beach in Miami. Cinematographer Mott Hupfel strove to lend the film's Florida scenes the brightly hued look of picture postcards.

Retro Sexy



Above: Hupfel gives director Mary Harron a peek through his viewfinder. **Right:** Bettie struggles to grasp the Stanislavski Method after enrolling in a class taught by an acting coach (Austin Pendleton).

filters to help give the actress a period look. “I lit her like they used to light Olivia de Havilland. They put the filter on, and she’d have to turn her head a certain way, and this light was up here, and there’s the special light for the eyes: classical Hollywood lighting. Gretchen loved it and Mary loved it, and the make-up artists said, ‘How did you do that?’ I said, ‘I did it like the guys 50 years ago.’ It’s like my old Czech film teacher taught me at NYU: there’s only one way to do the close-up, with seven different lights — but in school we only had four lights in the kit. Gretchen was often lit with a bounced 2K and an additional direct Tweenie or Inky to pop her eyes. I liked to do low, soft rimlights, either heavily diffused Inkies or 2-by-2 Kino Flos, just behind her shoulder and just out of frame.”

In certain locations, such as the courtroom at Brooklyn Borough Hall (where the Senate hearing scenes were shot), the production needed large sources. “We spent a lot of time prelighting the courtroom to get a feel for it, and we paid a lot of attention to showing the intricacies of the woodwork in order to overcome the heavy contrast that’s created by printing black-and-white onto color stock,” says Berg. When shooting on a modest budget, the



trick is to limit your “big guns” to a few days on the schedule, adds the gaffer. “We only had two Condor days on the entire film. I’ve worked as an electrician on huge films like *War of the Worlds*, where we had 10 Condors laid out over five blocks, and we just didn’t have that kind of option on this show.”

Of course, many of *Bettie Page*’s locations couldn’t even accommodate large movie lights. In the Klaw studio and other small sets, the filmmakers often used fixtures devised by Berg and referred to as “wagon trains” or “covered wagons.” The gaffer explains, “It’s a strip of batten with a lightbulb every 6 inches, and we wrapped chicken wire around them so we could use diffusion. The strips look like covered wagons would if you took the material off them.” Hupfel says, “Those units were really great. Timothy had some that were 2 feet long, some 4 feet long, and some 8 feet long. It’s basically like an old-fashioned Kino Flo. In a lot of places, we were able to put them up in the ceiling to create a level of light, and then I could bring classical hard light — Fresnels ranging from a Dedolight up to a 2K, depending on the size of the loca-

tion — in from the sides. That gave us the exact feel we needed.”

In terms of camerawork and shot setups, Hupfel also harkened back to the “old days” — specifically, once again, to Fuller. “There’s a scene in an office in *Pickup on South Street* that starts off on a two-shot,” says Hupfel. “When someone talks, it’s covered in a single, then the camera dollies back out to a two-shot. Then, when a third person comes in, the camera dollies out to a three-shot, and then back in to a two-shot. It’s basically one dolly move doing all the coverage. In movies made today, if the actor feels like he wants to walk over there, then we must let him. But in that scene, the actors are doing things in order to fit into the shots that had been set up.” Hupfel and Harron often tried to mimic this style, using a master dolly in many scenes even if they also did coverage. In one example, Page is tied up for a photo shoot in the Klaw studio, where she has a friendly conversation with the photographer (Jared Harris) about Jesus. “We covered that whole scene in a single dolly shot,” says the cinematographer. “We go back and forth — when we’re on her, we’re on her, and then

when he moves back, there's a semi-circular move and we're on him."

The production re-created several of Page's bondage movies, notably *Sally's Punishment*, using a hand-cranked Bolex and Eastman Double-X 7222 pushed one stop. For the rest of the picture, Hupfel used Arricam Studio and Lite cameras and Cooke S4 prime lenses. "We stuck pretty exclusively with three lenses: we did all of our close-ups on a 75mm and most of our coverage on a 27mm, and when we needed to get somewhere in between, we used a 40mm. Setting everything up with the same lenses somehow felt more old school."

At the close of the New York shoot, Hupfel shot his first color scene for the film, a sequence where Page has an epiphany during a church service in Miami. He found himself at a disadvantage because none of the Miami material had been filmed yet, yet he had to match the look of it in the church. "When I got to the location, I realized what I had planned wasn't really working, and I ended up using all the lights on the truck to achieve the look I wanted in color," he says. "We had seven 10Ks hanging off the ceiling, an incredible amount of soft light, and used [Tiffen] White Pro-Mists to milk out the colors. It was difficult to keep that wildly overlit feeling and give the church some dimension; it took lots of very broad and well-placed strokes. But it's my favorite scene; I love the mood of it."

One reason Hupfel needed so much light was that his color negative, the since-discontinued Eastman EXR 5248, is rated at ISO 100, which worked well for the Miami scenes. "I asked Kodak to dig up the oldest color film they could find, and it was 48, which just looks great — the colors really pop," he says. "I find all the Kodak stocks a little crazy compared to the way real life looks, but the craziness of 48 was right for this movie." The look of

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Retro Sexy

Hupfel makes a point while discussing a scene with Harron.



scenes set in Miami, where Page works with a female photographer (Sarah Paulson), was inspired by period postcards. "It's not really a Technicolor look," says Hupfel. "The postcards almost look like there's a layer of wax over them; they're bright colors, but somehow they're

milked out the tiniest bit. I guess that's what diffusion and fill light do. By that time, [makeup designer] Nicki Ledermann had worked out such good makeup with Gretchen that she had a sheen to her face, like everything was coated in some sort of a film." In the bright sun of

Miami, the 100-speed tungsten stock operated more in the 50-speed daylight realm, and once again, Hupfel "filled it in absurdly. I'd be sitting with the camera in the daylight, and right behind me would be two direct 18Ks. The sky was reading as 64, Gretchen was reading as 64, and everything was brought up to the brightest. The crew said, 'You're crazy, she'll burn!' But she never did."

Some of the other techniques the filmmakers devised didn't go as well as hoped. Visual shifts from black-and-white images to color magazine covers were achieved optically, but some had to be digitally enhanced. And the attempt to print black-and-white on color stock without doing a DI brought up other issues. "The problem is, when you shift from a very bright shot to a dark one, the color shifts even if the printer lights don't change a lot,"

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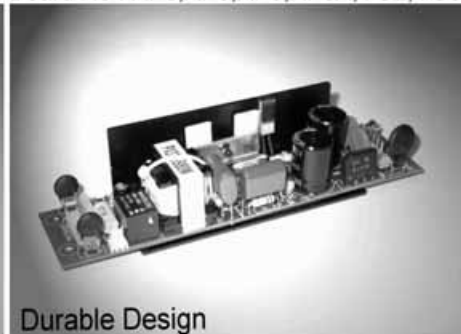
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says Hupfel. "The scene prints slightly green, or slightly blue or pink. The timer has to make subtle changes, and that change will affect the next shot. We never did get a decent black-and-white print, even though we had prints in our test that looked fine.

"When we were doing the color timing [with David Poltz] at DuArt in New York, we were also doing the DVD transfer from an IP in Los Angeles, and that transfer looked gorgeous," he continues. "Everyone up and down the line had been seeing the prints and freaking out a little bit, and all of a sudden they saw this perfect-looking DVD. So the decision was made to do a DI at LaserPacific, but it was done by using the video files for the DVD transfer rather than by scanning the negative. LaserPacific did an incredible job, but I would like to have been able to go back and scan the

negative." The major loss was the blooms Hupfel had so lovingly crafted for the *Pickup on South Street* look. "I spent a long time [in the DI suite] trying to get the highlights back, but the video couldn't really handle the different levels, and we'd lost that information. In the courtroom, I'd fought to have high-wattage bulbs put in all the little lamps, and the strong glow I was after now just looks like a flat, white lamp shape with a slight bloom around it."

Still, the cinematographer doesn't regret shooting the picture the way he did. "If we'd done it the way we were originally asked to, we would have shot on color and done a DI in New York," he says. "The way we did it was unique, and I was able to control [the images] better; you lose so much control if every decision is being made on that computer. Even in this version, the black-

and-white looks the way I imagined it except for the highlights, and the color is what I hoped it would be. There are eight or 10 shots I'd like to fix, but aside from that, it's pretty perfect." ■

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A Master's Palette

Jack Cardiff, BSC
reminisces about
his achievements
with Technicolor's
three-strip process.

by Robert S. Birchard



Renowned British cinematographer and director Jack Cardiff, BSC recently visited Los Angeles to help celebrate Technicolor's 90th anniversary with special events at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the American Cinematheque. In

2001, Cardiff was awarded an honorary Oscar — a first for a cinematographer — for his singular achievements in color cinematography. Nominated three times for Oscars in that category, he won for his work on Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *Black Narcissus*

(1947). On his recent visit to Los Angeles, Cardiff sat down with AC to discuss his career.

"It's a perfectly true story, and perhaps unbelievable, but I started as a child actor in 1918 when I was 4 years old," recalls Cardiff. "By the time I was 14, my acting career was

behind me and I was working as a tea boy on *The Informer* [1929], one of the last British silent films — a part-talkie, actually. The German director, Arthur Robison, had stomach trouble and had to drink Vichy water, and I used to bring it to him on a tray. I heard the boys in the camera department went abroad a lot, and I thought that sounded great. So I got into the camera department as a number boy, not because I was interested in photography, but because I thought I might get a fling at traveling abroad. Of course, for the next two years I only managed to get to the Isle of Wight, and just for one afternoon.”

Cardiff would go on to become a cinematographer noted for masterful three-strip Technicolor films such as *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948), and he also became a director of note. Although his name is synonymous with the golden age of British cinema, he says that his influences were largely American. “We were making very economical little films at the time and Hollywood was sending over these big classics with wonderful sets and lighting,” says Cardiff. “I got to realize the photography of certain people, among them [ASC members] George Barnes, Harry Stradling and Gregg Toland. Eventually I worked for Stradling as an operator on a number of pictures in England. He was a delightful man.

“At the same time, I formed a terrific love of painting, particularly the impressionists. They were daring, they had audacity, they had ideas. This was great training, and I said to myself, ‘Audacity is the ticket.’ I started to paint and still do. I had this sort of general education about light and also saw the way light worked in films.

“There are several aspects of lighting. There’s a broad sweep that’s sort of impressionistic and reasonably realistic, but some of our British



cameramen, and the French cameramen, too, were sort of ‘itty-bitty.’ George Perinal was considered one of the best cinematographers at the time, but he used dozens of lights — a little bit here, a little bit there — and it didn’t look natural. A big director who had been a cameraman came over from America to do a screen test, and when this director came on the set, he said: ‘Are you ready, Peri?’ Peri said, ‘Yes.’ Then the director said to the gaffer, ‘Kill that one, kill that one ...’ and he killed about 10 lights. Watching that was a lesson to me: simplicity.”

Although Cardiff cut his teeth in black-and-white cinematography as an assistant, his path toward becoming a director of photography began when he went to work for the English branch of Technicolor. “I was working as a kind of operator

and junior cameraman, and I would occasionally do odd inserts for features. A German, Count von Keller, came to Technicolor with his wife; they’d been traveling around with a 16mm camera shooting amateur movies, and their friends advised them to get a proper color camera and a cameraman to go with them. They were told they couldn’t borrow a three-strip camera, as there were only four in Britain. The Kellers said, ‘Alright, we’ll pay for it.’ I was assigned to go touring with them. We had a van and a whole Technicolor crew, and we shot travelogues.

“The Technicolor authorities at Westbury didn’t want their camera treated carelessly — the beam-splitting prism was a very delicate thing. The camera had to be checked in the bedroom of the

Opposite: In *Black Narcissus*, a prime example of three-strip Technicolor photography, Deborah Kerr plays Sister Clodagh, an Anglican nun who spearheads an effort to establish a religious community in the Himalayas. According to the film’s cinematographer, Jack Cardiff, BSC (pictured at left), the three-strip system sometimes saw colors differently than the eye. “Before we started *Black Narcissus*, I knew we had to be very careful because nuns don’t use makeup,” he says. “If the audience could tell they were made up, we were dead. We tried to ban lipstick, but we discovered during testing that Technicolor exaggerated the reds a bit so that the nuns’ natural lips looked like lipstick. We ended up having to add a bit of flesh color to the lips to take down the reds.”

A Master's Palette

The vibrant hues of the three-strip process are evident in this scene from *Black Narcissus*, in which Sisters Clodagh and Ruth (Kathleen Byron) consult with Mr. Dean (David Farrar), a local government official who becomes the object of Ruth's erotic fixation.



assistant cameraman, who also had to clean it every couple of days. Technicolor ordered us not to ever put the camera in a dangerous position, but I disobeyed all the rules. I took it on top of Mount Vesuvius during an eruption! Technicolor was furious, and I was about to be fired, but then they sent a telegram saying they'd been impressed with the dailies and my job was secure, at least for the moment. Those little travelogues were exciting work and gave me an opportunity to light what I liked. I gained great confidence in my abilities, but I wanted to photograph a big production.

"I had worked with a very good cameraman, Claude Friese-Greene, as a focus puller and operator. His father, William Friese-Greene, arguably developed one of the first cameras to record motion in England. Director Norman Walker

wanted Claude to photograph *The Great Mr. Handel* in Technicolor, but Claude was a black-and-white man. He said, 'I'm sorry, but I haven't got any color photography background and don't want to take a chance on that.' Then he had the idea of working on it with me. He said, 'Let Jack photograph the first two weeks of the picture and I'll watch.' And that's how I got my first break as a lighting cameraman on a set.

"After that, it was back to shooting inserts and doing second-unit work, which is very dreary because the first unit does all the exciting things. I was working second unit on one or two exteriors and Michael Powell came to supervise, and I think he sort of liked my work because I worked very fast and was confident. One shot I had to do was of a wall with animal's heads mounted on it. This shot depicted a

love affair gone bad; the character had gone around the world shooting animals to forget his lost love. The animal heads had horns, and [they were] very difficult to shoot because every light I put on [them] made duplicate shadows — horns all over the bloody wall — but I had all day to do it. Eventually I heard someone say, 'Very interesting,' and I turned around and there was Powell. He said, 'Would you like to photograph my next film?' It was *A Matter of Life and Death*."

Technicolor's three-strip system utilized three separate rolls of black-and-white film to create color separation masters in the camera; the color was achieved in printing. Yellow, cyan and magenta dye-soaked matrices struck from the original separation negatives were brought into contact with a blank roll of film in a process that was sim-



ilar to color lithography. Cardiff has great respect for the vibrant color Technicolor could achieve, but he acknowledges that the three-strip system made for a difficult working environment. “The Technicolor camera needed an enormous amount of light — I think it was 650 footcandles at a lens aperture of 2.5. Generally we were forced to use arc lamps to get enough light, and that could be a problem with the actors. In a two-shot, for example, one person wouldn’t take any notice at all, but the other would say, ‘I’m sorry, but the lights are so strong! Take it down a bit.’ I did all I could to make it easier for the actors; I had barn doors on all the lamps so I could put a little lid over them or take out glare.

“*Black Narcissus* was shot at a time when everyone used arc lamps and hardly any Inkies. The noise from the arcs was such that the sound people routinely said, ‘We’ll have to dub this later.’ We also had a lot of haze from the carbon dust — every half an hour we’d open the stage doors to let the dust haze get out.

“To achieve a higher diaphragm setting to get more depth of field, we had to increase the light. Most cameramen don’t like to change their levels, but it’s some-

times necessary, and I got used to doing it. Once or twice Powell wanted someone very close in the foreground sharp and someone in the background sharp, and the poor actors were almost burned alive! It was a tough, tough way of working.

“We also had a big blimp that was bloody difficult. There was a certain lack of freedom in moving the camera around. You couldn’t dolly with it, not like you can with the average small camera. There was no reflex viewing, and the rangefinder system on the side of



the blimp was just adequate.

“We didn’t stop to reload film. We had two cameras all the time, and when we needed to reload we’d slide out one camera from the blimp and replace it with the other. That saved a lot of time. If we hadn’t done that, we would’ve had to stop at least every 15 minutes to reload the camera.

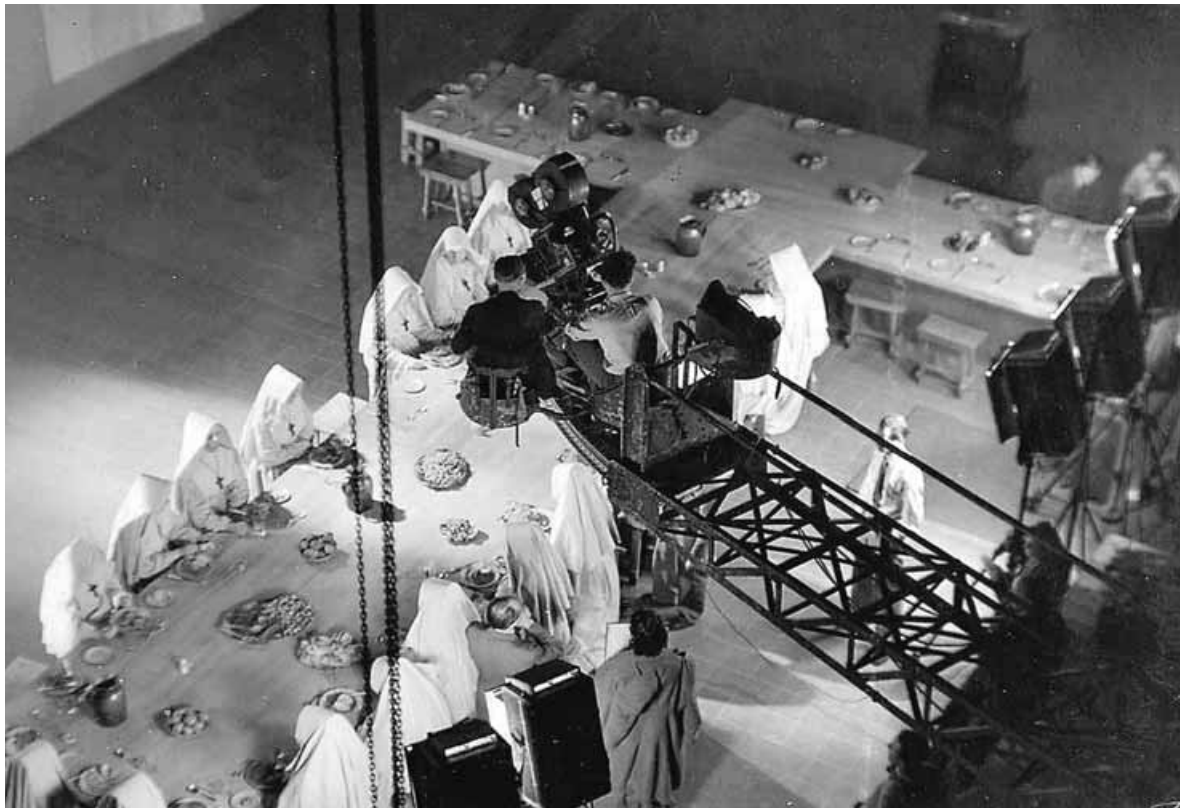
“Technicolor also laid down a

Top left: Sister Clodagh tends to business. Above: Cardiff adjusts an arc light on the set of the Technicolor production *The Magic Box* (1951), based on the life of William Friese-Greene, a British inventor who is often credited with inventing cinematography in Britain. In fact, Friese-Greene developed a sequential camera that was a precursor to motion pictures. Left: A lobby card for *Black Narcissus* trumpets the glories of Cardiff’s cinematography.



A Master's Palette

For this overhead shot, the three-strip camera is unblimped, cutting down on weight and cumbersome bulk. Because of the considerable noise generated by both the arc lamps and the Technicolor camera, much of the film's production sound was good only as a guide track for postproduction looping.



lot of strange laws. They were interested in showcasing their process, not necessarily in the requirements of filmmakers. If an actor was supposed to wear a white shirt, we had to deal with different grades of slightly grayish whites because Technicolor dictated we couldn't use pure white. But after a while, when we were shooting outside, we'd notice that passersby wearing white looked all right [on film]. So eventually we were able to have whites on studio sets."

Like other cinematographers working in the three-strip process, Cardiff also had to contend with what he terms "a so-called color expert." Natalie Kalmus, ex-wife of Technicolor co-founder Herbert Kalmus, received credit as Technicolor consultant on *Black Narcissus*, but Cardiff says she was never on the set. "Natalie would be floating about, but a lot of directors said they didn't want her on the set. [On *Black Narcissus*] there was a woman called Joan Bridges who was

very meek and just made occasional suggestions."

Even though some filmmakers resented the presence of the color consultants, Technicolor's rules were important because the three-strip system sometimes saw colors differently than the eye. "Before we started *Black Narcissus*, I knew we had to be very careful because nuns don't use makeup," says Cardiff. "If the audience could tell they were made up, we were dead. We tried to ban lipstick, but we discovered during testing that Technicolor exaggerated the reds a bit so that the nuns' natural lips looked like lipstick. We ended up having to add a bit of flesh color to the lips to take down the reds."

One major frustration in working with three-strip Technicolor was that the cinematographer and director saw most of their dailies in black-and-white. It was standard practice for the Technicolor laboratory to supply monochrome work prints for most of the footage. "At the end of each scene in

the rushes, there was a pilot shot that would give us an indication of the general colors," recalls Cardiff. "Sometimes the director would ask to see an entire scene printed in color, but that happened only very occasionally. The monochrome rushes were printed from the cyan record, and that could sometimes give you a shock. When I first started, I photographed a commercial film called *Steel*, and I filmed in a factory that had big, flaming-hot, bright-orange ingots. When we saw the rushes, there was nothing to be seen — the ingots just disappeared! We were terrified, but then we realized the cyan record didn't pick up yellow at all."

A hallmark of Cardiff's style was his audacious use of colored lights to add dramatic impact to a scene. "When I had a lamp effect, I used a warm filter on what were supposed to be the source lights and then sometimes used a very pale blue filtered light to fill. You could build up a lot of [visual] interest just

by the color relationship itself.

"I had a system for lighting candle effects. Overhead I had a full spot, soft, gelled with an amber filter to create light that looked as if it were coming from the flame. Then I'd get a painter to paint the candle a dark ochre so it looked like the shadow a candle would cast. I emphasized it by painting it dark and then gradually easing off so that when it got to an inch from the top, it was clear. That looked like the thing was on even before we lit it, and I had the light on a dimmer going up and down during the scene. It was very complicated. I even had an electrician with a long stick punch the rope holding the overhead spot so it wangled a bit to make it look like the flames. Oddly enough, even with the high light levels required by Technicolor, we had no problem picking up the actual candle flame.

"There's one shot in *Black Narcissus* that makes me go 'Ugh!' every time I see it: the long shot when the nuns are carrying candles. It's a very long shot and it's all arc-lit, and I couldn't get any effect of the candles. If we did that today we'd have an actual candle and an Inky that was very low, but in those days we were bothered so much with the Natalie Kalmus [edict] that there couldn't be any positive black. You had to light everything, and if the shadows were left without any light at all there were occasionally times when they looked a bit green or red. I used to take a chance with that a bit and let the shadows go, because otherwise it's just like a theatrical pantomime and not realistic.

"By the time we made *The Red Shoes*, my third picture with Powell, the Brute lamp had come out, and I loved it. I learned of it when I was in Hollywood for some reason, and Pete Mole at Mole-Richardson said he'd made a new lamp and offered to show it to me. It was big, but I like to use one lamp



Top: The exterior of the "house of women," former home to the old general's wives and set aside as a convent by the new general. Onscreen, the backlot sets give a near-perfect impression of being in the mountainous regions of northern India. The illusion was further enhanced by the large wind machine. **Director Michael Powell** is to the left of the camera, wearing a white shirt and dark Ascot. **Bottom:** In this closer angle of the wind machine, Powell (kneeling at center) confers with Cardiff (wearing sunglasses).



and then fillers, and he said this one lamp would do it. They had just one unit and were making a second one. I thought it was marvelous, and he sent over the first two Brutes."

One of the most visually exciting moments in *Black Narcissus* occurs when Sister Ruth (Kathleen Byron) puts on a red dress she has ordered by mail and, with awkward determination, applies lipstick before she attempts to seduce Mr. Dean (David Farrar), the English adviser to the local Indian prince. "The scene is purposely larger than life," says Cardiff. "We thought we needed that exaggeration. Funnily enough, the shot where Ruth puts

that lipstick on became extraordinarily successful. A lot of people who have nothing to do with the cinema say, 'Oh, I know that film, it has that terrifying shot with the nun putting the lipstick on.'"

Black Narcissus is set in India, but except for a few exteriors that were shot in Ireland, nearly all of the film was filmed on soundstages and on the backlots at the Denham and Pinewood studios in England. Art director Alfred Junge's sets and scenery achieve credibility even though they were conceived in a theatrical, painterly vein. Part of the illusion was achieved through the matte paintings of Percy "Papa" Day.

A Master's Palette



The bell tower outside the Himalayan convent appeared to be hundreds of feet above a deep canyon, but the set was built only a few feet off the ground on the backlot at Denham Studio. The illusion of height was supplied by Percy Day's matte paintings. The unblimped Technicolor camera is lashed to the parallel to prevent an accidental fall. The light-hungry Technicolor three-strip system required supplemental light on day exteriors — note the large pile of arc lamps at the ready.

"The backlot of any studio is usually in dreadful condition," notes Cardiff. "There were trucks and bits of rubbish all over the place, but we had one thing in our favor: Papa Day. Like the early days of glass shots, we just made a matte with a piece of black cardboard that blotted out the background, Day would paint the missing parts of the scenery, and we'd make a reverse matte with the cardboard and shoot it. Many viewers thought we'd gone out on location — in fact, Powell got a letter from someone who said he'd lived in that particular place, and he thought it was all real. Day was great; everyone called him 'Papa' because he looked about 150 years of age, but he was quite sprightly and he was probably 60."

Because *Black Narcissus* was "studio-bound," several "exteriors" were shot in the great indoors of a soundstage. "It was asking for trou-

ble to do exteriors on a stage, but I think I made it work," says Cardiff. "To make it look natural, I had a lot of lights above with bluish filters — like a sky reflection — that illumined the tops of [the actors'] heads, and what was absolutely necessary to give an effect of sunlight [were units with] amber filters [lighting] the actors."

"In *A Matter of Life and Death*, there's a scene where David Niven is supposed to be in a garden and the magician casts a spell that freezes Niven in time. Well, as it was magic, it obviously had to be something very different from ordinary light. I suggested to Powell that I use a lemon filter for sunlight instead of amber so the light wouldn't look that natural, and he loved the idea. Not many people noticed it, really, but it was there."

Even though Cardiff was closely associated with Technicolor's

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Film student on set with Industry Mentor, Chuck Minsky, during the Kodak 35mm Project earlier this year.

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three-strip system and won an Oscar for his cinematography on *Black Narcissus*, he was not particularly sorry when the three-strip cameras were retired in the early 1950s. "We were very happy when Eastmancolor came in because we could use 10Ks instead of big arc lights and have it quiet. I was working on a three-strip film with Hitchcock, *Under Capricorn* [1949], and Ingrid Bergman was in it. Every scene we did was with arc lights, and because of the noise on set most of the sound recordings were just guide tracks and to be dubbed afterwards. Ingrid put her foot down on one sequence. She said, 'I don't want to act this scene knowing it has to be dubbed. I'd like this sequence shot with incandescent light.' Now, it wasn't impossible; you could use incandescent light on a very small set, but very few people did it because it required so many Inkies.



The always-dapper Cardiff recently shared his memories of *Black Narcissus* prior to a screening of the film at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills. Presented by the Academy in association with the British Film Institute, the event was part of a salute to Michael Powell.

So I said, 'Sure.' I used 5Ks on the spot rail and one or two smaller lamps downstairs. It was difficult, but I did it. Ironically, the scene had to be retaken because for the first


time, even with the huge blimp, we heard the noise of the Technicolor camera!" ■






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A Style of Subtlety

ASC Board of Governors honoree Sydney Pollack deftly balances plot and performance with picture.

by David E. Williams

“I don’t mean to be coy about it, but I was never what I would call a great shooter or great visual stylist,” says director Sydney Pollack, recipient of this year’s ASC Board of Governors Award. “There are many other directors who are very technically proficient in terms of lighting and the camera, and I do have a good basic knowledge, but my head had always been more in the drama. The shooting of a film is a tool for telling that particular story, so I’ve never really come up with a particular style that’s as extreme as what other directors are known for. That side is simply more intuitive for other people. All I really knew as a director when I started was something about acting.”

The Board of Governors Award, which Pollack accepted late last month at the 20th annual ASC Outstanding Achievement Awards, is bestowed upon individuals who have made significant and lasting contributions to the art of filmmaking. Previous recipients include Gregory Peck, Charles Champlin, Fay Kanin, Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, Jodie Foster, Robert Wise, Francis Ford Coppola, Robert Altman and Gilbert Cates. Over the course of his career, Pollack has



worked with an array of ASC greats, including Loyal Griggs (*The Slender Thread*), James Wong Howe (*This Property Is Condemned*), Phil Lathrop (*They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?*), Harry Stradling Jr. (*The Way We Were*), and Owen Roizman (*Three Days of the Condor*, *The Electric Horseman*, *Absence of Malice*, *Tootsie* and *Havana*). More recently, Pollack has collaborated with ASC members John Seale (*The Firm*), Giuseppe Rotunno (*Sabrina*), Philippe Rousselot (*Random Hearts*) and Darius Khondji (*The Interpreter*).

When asked which film first made an impression on him because of its cinematography, Pollack replies, “It was probably *A Place in the Sun*, or maybe *Shane*. What’s interesting is they were both shot by the same cameraman, Loyal Griggs [working under William C. Mellor, ASC], who was the cinematographer on my first movie, *The Slender Thread* [1965]. I didn’t select him because of that, it was just chance. Loyal was very old at that time, and that was a black-and-white picture — the only black-and-white film I ever made. There was emotionality



Opposite: Pollack plots a sequence in the United Nations General Assembly room while filming *The Interpreter*, shot by Darius Khondji, ASC, AFC. This page, top: Pollack and Dustin Hoffman work out a scene for the hit comedy *Tootsie* (1982), which showcased not only a hilarious script but also the Oscar-nominated cinematography of Owen Roizman, ASC. Bottom: Pollack and Roizman (center) on location in the Dominican Republic while making their fifth feature together, the steamy drama *Havana* (1990).

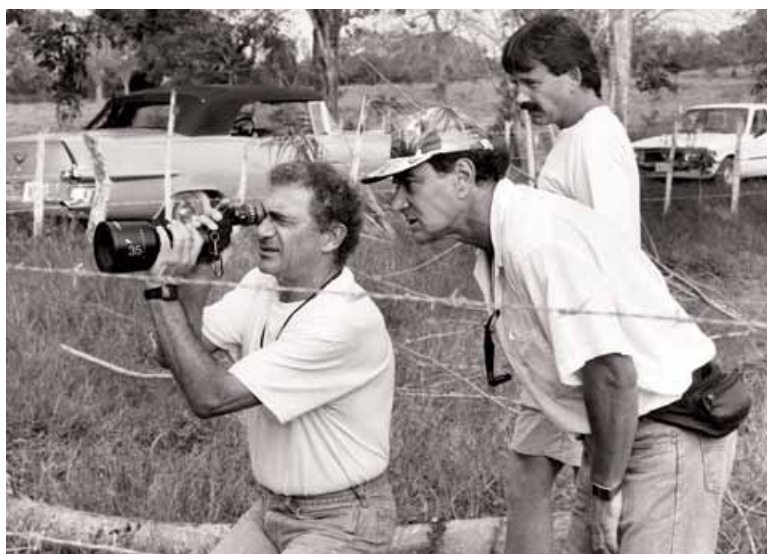
in those two pictures of his that I didn't understand at the time and probably couldn't explain today. In *A Place in the Sun*, I remember the shots of the boats in the distance and Montgomery Clift's face when Elizabeth Taylor comes to see him in jail at the end, those gigantic close-ups. But I suppose I really became more consciously aware of cinematography by studying [ASC member] Boris Kaufman's work in Elia Kazan's movies."

Given Pollack's own reputation as an "actor's director," this should come as no surprise, as the exemplary collaboration between Kazan and Kaufman produced a trio of powerful films: *On the Waterfront*, *Baby Doll* and *Splendor in the Grass*. "I was really into Kazan at the time," recalls Pollack. "There always seemed to be enormous tension in Kaufman's work, in the framing and lighting. It created the perfect mood for the drama."

While filming *They Shoot Horses* in 1969, Lathrop told *American Cinematographer*, "[Pollack] is probably the most knowledgeable director

I've ever worked with. He understands the camera and camera movement. He knows what lenses do and whether a particular shot can or can't be made. It's a rare pleasure to work with someone who really understands these things, especially on a difficult assignment like this." Hearing this praise today, Pollack offers, "I was so anxious to prove I could fill the big screen that I made everybody seasick with *The*

Slender Thread. You have to take Dramamine to watch it! We were zooming in every shot and up in helicopters and I was wheeling people around on furniture dollies, and I had to do that myself because my operator weighed about 240 pounds and nobody else could budge him. When I watched the finished film, I thought it was a mess visually. I was trying too hard, but I learned from it. ➤



A Style of Subtlety



Pollack and cinematographer Phil Lathrop, ASC largely shot *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969) on Stage 4 at Warner Bros., where the film's central marathon dance competition was imaginatively covered with all manner of moving cameras — from towering cranes to skateboard dollies — to bring the audience into the action.

"I don't feel I've ever been 'prepared,' but I have felt the pressure to prepare," he continues. "Truth be told, I don't know if I really know what to do. I don't think I've ever held anybody up on a set while trying to figure out what the next shot is, but I often get the shots while I'm there, after the actors' rehearsal. Of course, if we're doing something really complex, like the bus explosion in *The Interpreter* [see AC May '05], then I'll prepare.

"It was on my third film, *The Scalphunters* [shot by Duke Callaghan and Richard Moore, ASC], that I first used widescreen, and I found there was a different kind of preparation that had to go into filling the screen. It was *such* a big frame. My experience in still photography really helped in that regard; I had a bathroom darkroom in my little New York apartment

with trays in the bathtub, and I was always playing around with compositions. I had no idea I was going to end up directing films, but I paid a lot of attention to [composition]. So I was tremendously interested in the camera when I started directing, and I then learned most of what I came to know while working in television."

This training ground consisted largely of a two-year stint on the medical drama *Ben Casey*, during which Pollack worked with cameraman Ted Voigtländer, ASC and "directed pretty much every other episode," as well as segments of *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* and *The Fugitive*. "In those days, TV production wasn't set up so you could see a set before you shot it," he recalls. "You *might* see it the night before. And it was rare to have more than five days to shoot an hour-long

show, so you had to work fast. I did 15 or 17 episodes a year for almost five years, and that was my film school. I learned editing, lenses, how to shoot action, how to create tension, and I did it in an environment where the stakes weren't that high. On *Ben Casey*, if I made a mistake on an episode, we were on to the next one before that had even aired."

Coming of age as a director in the 1960s, Pollack was part of American film's transition to a more naturalistic approach. "The last film I did in the classic Hollywood style was *The Way We Were*, which was also a period Hollywood film about Hollywood. Every shot almost looks like a studio gallery still that you'd see in the hallways at MGM, and that was what we were going for. I always try to use a visual style that best suits the story but doesn't draw too much attention to itself. In my later films,

the stories we were telling wouldn't have been served by the 'Hollywood' style. For me, stories and acting dictate the look of a film. I didn't start as an art director, editor or cinematographer; I came at filmmaking from a completely different point of view."

Asked how his perspectives on acting for the camera may have been influenced by his experiences performing in such films as *Tootsie*, *Husbands and Wives* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, Pollack says, "Stanley [Kubrick] was a great photographer. He had a cinematographer on the picture [Larry Smith], of course, but Stanley chose the lights and the lenses and was a stickler on compositions. I don't go that far at all. As a director, my goal is always to be very prepared but leave room for the creative contributions from both the cinematographer and the actors. That's a question of balance.

"The movies I've directed have been so character-driven that I have always had to draw a line at a point where I didn't want the cinematography to draw too much attention to itself. I never wanted to make a film *about* the cinematography. But I have been so lucky in working with cinematographers who figure out how to shoot the picture in a way that supports the work of the actors while still making a visual statement. In a way, that brings out the emotion of the picture."

The 1990 thriller *Havana*, which stars Robert Redford as a shady American in steamy, pre-Castro Cuba, is perhaps Pollack's most expressionistic work in terms of camerawork and lighting, courtesy of longtime collaborator Roizman. "That look was driven by what Havana was like in 1959," says Pollack. "It was this phantasmagoria of sexuality and sensuality — the nightclubs, music and colors of Cuba. I wanted to catch all that. I was pushing for a strong visual style,

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A Style of Subtlety

and I was very comfortable working with Owen — I always was — and that allowed both of us to be more expressive. We started using [Tiffen] Pro-Mist filters that added a visual buzz to everything, and it was fun. That look was right for that picture.

“One of the reasons I loved working with Owen was that he was able to make the film look more beautiful than reality, but not so much so that you were just gasping at picturesque shots and beautiful lighting. His work always stayed within the context of the drama and supported it. That’s creative restraint. All the cinematographers I’ve worked with have had that, but they also knew when to push into more extreme concepts. Owen certainly could. Look at Darius [Khondji]’s work in *Evita* — it’s very visually expressive, but [director] Alan Parker is very much a

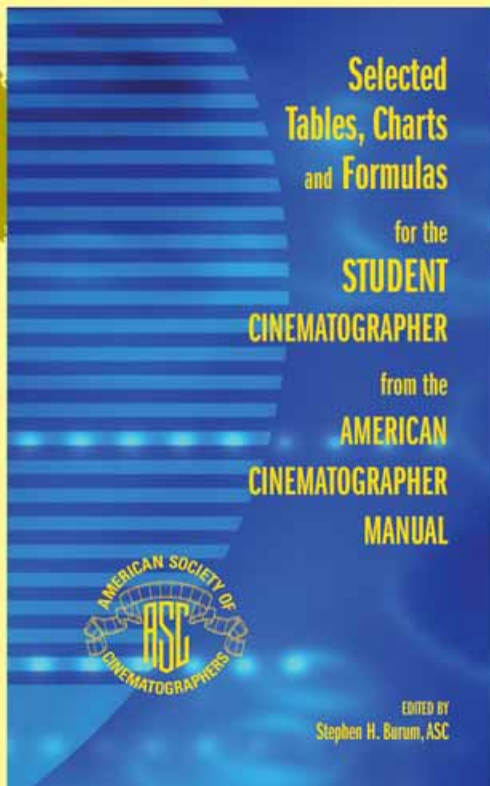
visual stylist.

“Owen was also the first cameraman I worked with who was my contemporary,” he continues. “He’s about my age, we had similar experiences and influences, and we became very close friends. Creatively, that relationship was fantastic. Owen knew what to trust me with and what not to trust me with. We grew together both craft-wise and in our standing in the business. I came off some successful pictures before we met on *Three Days of the Condor*, and together we did a string of extremely successful films.”

Location became a central character in Pollack’s romantic epic *Out of Africa* (1985), which was photographed on location in Kenya by David Watkin, BSC. The film earned both men Academy Awards, among many other honors. “Building the landscapes into the

visual style was organic thematically because of what the film was about,” says Pollack. “I was trying to tell a story about possession, and I wanted the background and foreground to rhyme with each other. The story is about a woman [played by Meryl Streep] who wants to possess an unpossessable man [played by Redford] and possess and change a country. The colonials came to that part of the world and tried to turn indigenous Africans into little Englishmen, in the process destroying something unique. So the identity of the African people and land was an important character in the picture. World War I is also in the background. All those themes began to echo each other and led me to find a style of shooting that would reflect that.

“There were also technical issues we had to take into account.



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We were on the equator — the ugliest light in the world was coming straight down on us at an elevation of 5,500 feet. It's the only place in the world where I've had an honest exposure reading of $f/32$; even in snow, you'd get less! So we did a weird thing by using the fastest film available at the time [Agfa 320], even though we had all that light, because the thicker emulsions of the faster film softened the look. We also tried to shoot all the key scenes in the early morning or afternoon because the light was so ugly during the rest of the day."

As a director, the creative liaison between cast and camera, what wisdom does Pollack impart to his actors? "The main thing I emphasize is that the camera is a microscope. It absolutely cannot be lied to, so if you are relaxed and think a thought, the camera will see it. Too



Pollack and cinematographer John Seale, ASC, ACS check a composition while filming the thriller *The Firm* (1993).

many actors believe they need to add something more to make that visible — a habit that comes from stage work — but the best film actors know how much work the camera is doing for them and let it do what it can. They make the camera come inside to them rather than

trying to give so much. Harrison Ford knows that. Robert Redford knows it better than anybody. Tom Cruise learned it. The camera is a lie detector." ■

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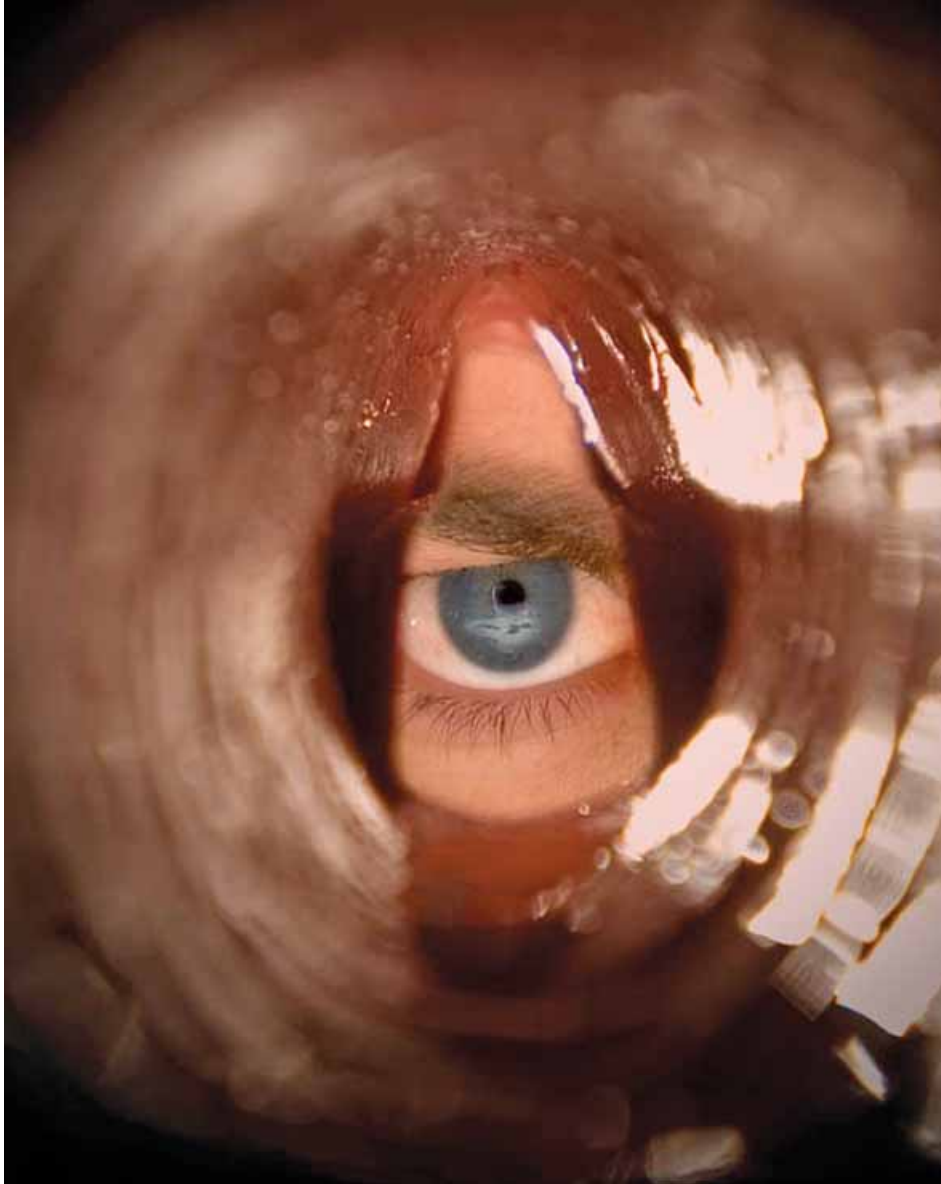
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Short Takes

A Gynecological First

by John Pavlus



Early in preproduction on his award-winning short film *The Big Empty*, Newton Thomas Sigel, ASC faced a dilemma familiar to indie filmmakers everywhere: how to favorably describe his film to “the suits.” Luckily for Sigel, the suit in question was friend and

collaborator George Clooney, who partners with Steven Soderbergh in the production company Section Eight. Hoping to give his project some credibility, Sigel gave the script to Clooney and asked to use Section Eight’s name. The script review went about as well as one

could hope. Sigel recalls, “George looked at it and said, ‘I don’t quite know what this is about, but sure.’”

So what *is* the film about? “It seems pretty straightforward, but at first I had trouble describing it without giving away the whole story,” says Sigel. “Now I find that describing the opening is a good way to get people off on the right foot.” The camera starts inside a vagina, as a speculum parts it to reveal an obstetrician’s eye peering in. The camera then rises up through the body as the doctor raises his head from between the parted legs and addresses the camera: “I’ve never seen anything like this!”

“That lets you know right away from what point of view we’re going to be telling this story, and that there’s something a bit unusual about this lady,” says Sigel, who photographed *The Big Empty* and co-directed it with his wife, J. Lisa Chang. The main character, Alice (Selma Blair), does have quite a problem: she’s literally empty inside. Her birth canal leads not to a womb, but to an arctic wasteland. Adapted from Alison Smith’s short story “The Specialist,” the film follows Alice as she travels from doctor to doctor hoping to find an explanation — and a cure — for her inner void.

Sigel says he and Chang “pulled on every favor we were ever owed from every job we’d ever done in our entire lives” to stretch their \$50,000 budget for the project. They were putting all their savings into this labor of love and had to make every penny count. Procuring Panavision equipment and Kodak film stock wasn’t difficult for the veteran cinematographer, but Sigel admits that attracting actors to the offbeat project might have been difficult



Opposite: In *The Big Empty*, an obstetrician peers into a woman's birth canal and discovers something quite unexpected. The short film, shot by Newton Thomas Sigel, ASC, was a labor of love co-directed by Sigel and his wife, J. Lisa Chang. This page, left: The woman, Alice (Selma Blair), awaits inspection in a medical theater. Below: A specialist (Elias Koteas) prepares to take a peek.

without the Section Eight imprimatur. "I was worried that we needed some kind of legitimate company to approach some of the actors we wanted," he says. "Having that name gave us a bit of added credibility." (In addition to Blair, the cast includes Elias Koteas, Richard Kind, Hugh Laurie, and, as an extra, Haskell Wexler, ASC.)

To create the singular opening shot, Sigel approached Andrew Clement of Creative Creature Engineering, who is known for his impeccable work creating animatronic infants. "I asked him, 'How are you with a vagina?'" Sigel deadpans. "And he said, 'So far, no complaints.'" Clement built a tube out of silicone that was large enough to accommodate a lens and small enough to reasonably match the size of the speculum, and he coated the inside with Fairy dishsoap "to give it a more organic feel," says Sigel. To light this unique interior, Sigel placed two hard sources as three-quarter backlight to rake along the inner walls of the prosthetic as the doctor peers inside. "Then, as the lens rises up through the body, there's a dissolve to the B side of the shot, which was done on a set with the camera between Selma's legs in the foreground and the doctor framed in the

background. We used some internal organs as the 'wipe' between the two shots."

The filmmakers storyboarded the entire film and prepped for two weeks before embarking on one week of principal photography. Sigel operated himself — his main camera was a Panaflex

Millennium equipped with Primo lenses — and shot in the 1.85:1 aspect ratio. "As much as I love 2.35, it seemed 1.85 was the best of both worlds," he notes. "We could compose in a way that would work both for the film's television life and its festival life." He says he had no trouble calling upon friends and





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colleagues for production help, but "because those people are really good, they're always working. Finding crew who had that many days in a row free was pretty near impossible."

Sigel and Chang decided their story called for a visual tone that was somewhat grounded in reality, albeit one "that never existed, or only exists in the imagination," according to Sigel. He lit the interiors in an organic, source-motivated style, yet suffused them with an ethereal softness by using light Tiffen Soft/FX diffusion filters on the lens to create an "allegorical, fairytale quality." An exception to this approach was the office of the specialist (Koteas), whose eccentric understanding of Alice's condition demanded a moodier style.

Sigel shot *The Big Empty* on test rolls of Kodak Vision2 500T 5218 and Vision2 100T 5212. Matching the donated stock wasn't a concern, but rationing it often was. He recalls, "We were always juggling how much to shoot when so that we wouldn't run out. We also had almost no 1,000-foot loads, so mag changes were frequent."

With their compressed shooting schedule and tight budget, the filmmakers were compelled to choose locations based on their proximity to each other as well as their suitability. The Section Eight connection proved useful in that regard, allowing Sigel to use sets from the television series *ER* for the doctors' offices and Alice's apartment. But the scheduling consideration proved especially challenging when scouting for the lecture hall in which *The Specialist* presents Alice and his diagnosis of her condition to his colleagues. The schedule allotted just one day to shoot that scene and two others, one in a bookstore and one in a sports bar. "We wanted something like one of those old-time medical theaters where they used to dissect cadavers," says Sigel. "We did find stuff like that, but never close enough to the bookstore to make it work for our schedule. Because of that, and because *The Specialist* is giving a slide presentation in a darkened room, we decided to suggest the



Sigel seeks out an interesting angle with his Aaton.

setting more abstractly.”

The production rented an empty warehouse and built risers to seat a row of doctors and scientists. “We put Selma in the gynecological chair, which was gently spinning around on a turntable, and filled the frame with a row of white coats,” says Sigel. He framed Koteas at a podium in front of a large screen, upon which is projected footage taken from an “expedition” to Alice’s icy interior. (In reality, these were clips from a documentary about the Arctic.) “I like that scene because it gets across what the specialist is about and sets the tone by using impressionistic touches instead of a big wide shot with lots of detail,” says Sigel.

Sigel finished *The Big Empty* with a digital intermediate (DI), and although the process might seem like a luxury for a short film, “so is doing prints,” he says. “Until you have no money, you don’t realize how expensive every little thing is.” Once again, he was able to leverage professional connections, this time from Technicolor Digital Intermediates, where he grades much of his commercial work with colorist Steve “Sparkle” Arkle. “I went to Technicolor and said, ‘I’ve been really loyal to you guys, and now you’re gonna pay for that!’” he jokes. “Of course, I was always doing my work at 11 p.m., or whatever bizarre hour Sparkle wasn’t working on other projects. Technicolor Creative Services was just then building

its DI suite, so we actually became one of the guinea pigs to get them up and running.” The DI greatly enhanced production values by letting Sigel “create a certain softness and fairytale quality that we didn’t have the resources to do completely in camera. Ultimately, Sparkle was able to correct most of my disasters!”

The Big Empty has won awards at the USA Film Festival, the Malibu Film

Festival, and the Athens International Film and Video Festival. Of his maiden voyage in the tumultuous realm of “freebie filmmaking,” Sigel couldn’t be prouder. “It was a nonstop process of pulling rabbits out of hats, but it was all very seamless. Lisa and I were so in sync about everything that we only had one disagreement: when to break for lunch.” ■



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KatieBird
***Certifiable**
Crazy Person
was shot by
Joshua Fong
using four
digital-video
cameras and
then presented
in a multi-
paneled format
to convey the
fractured mental
state of its main
character
(Helene Udy).

The Fractured World of *KatieBird*

by Stephanie Argy

In the horror film *KatieBird* *Certifiable Crazy Person, a woman (played by Helene Udy) recounts her journey from innocent girl to serial killer for her psychiatrist, who is also her lover and next victim. In the process, the movie flashes back to KatieBird's younger years, when her father (Lee Perkins) raised her to live the only life he, his father and grandfather had all known: that of a murderer.

The subject matter is intense, and director Justin Paul Ritter chose a style that was equally challenging: 90 percent of the movie comprises multi-paneled frames that present each scene from several perspectives simultaneously. Because *KatieBird* was shot with four different digital-video (DV) cameras, it offered the filmmakers an unusual chance to compare footage from those cameras side by side.

Before making *KatieBird*, Ritter had worked on other filmmakers' projects, mainly doing visual effects. But by the end of 2002, he decided to make a movie of his own. "I told myself no matter what, I was going to shoot a

feature by December 12, 2003, because if I didn't make it by then, I'd be out of money."

Years earlier, while working at Roger Corman's Concorde Pictures, Ritter had talked his way into rewriting screenplays for the company, but he soon found himself so burned out on cop-by-day/stripper-by-night movies that he could no longer face the page. "When you put all your creative energy into something you really don't like, it eats you alive, and you don't have any energy to do anything for yourself," he says. On his fourth rewrite, he stared at his computer screen for two weeks, and then, in desperation, discarded the studio's original idea and spent two days writing whatever came into his mind. "This insanely angry abomination of a screenplay poured out of me, and it was *KatieBird*. I was hoping they would be as offended by my material as I was by theirs, and I succeeded. There was a line of people waiting to fire me."

Ritter tore up the studio's check and held on to the rights to his script, and he felt it was natural to return to that script for his first feature. During his years in production, Ritter had crossed paths several times with Joshua Fong, a cinematographer who has also worked

as a storyboard and comic-book artist, and he asked Fong to shoot *KatieBird*. Impressed by what Anthony Dod Mantle, DFF, BSC had accomplished with DV on *28 Days Later* (see *AC* July '03), Ritter and Fong started out thinking that at worst, they could make *KatieBird* using Fong's own Canon XL1. But they investigated other options and were eventually able to obtain a Sony HDW-F900 HD camera; the body came from Jeff Blauvelt of HD Cinema and the accessories were provided by Panavision's New Filmmaker Program.

Ritter began to envision a way of telling his story in a series of multi-image frames, which would not only enable him to show footage from various cameras onscreen at the same time, but also make it possible for him to fit many more shots into the movie. The three other cameras Fong eventually used on the picture were his Canon XL1, a Panasonic AG-DVX100, and the first incarnation of JVC's HDV camera.

KatieBird was shot in Palmdale and El Segundo, California, over 10 days in December 2003. Ritter spent the following year doing postproduction, working with Fong and producer Matt Quan. (Quan did all the sound editing and mixing and also marketed the movie.)

The key element of the project's post phase was Ritter's development of the multi-paneled narrative style. He cut the movie straight through from beginning to end, and for about the first half, he used the simple matte tools built into Final Cut Pro. However, he found those too limited for the kind of cropping and moving he wanted to do. Searching the Internet, he found a \$10 filter called DH_Box (from Digital Heaven), which allowed him to quickly reposition, resize and crop an image. Because he could work so much faster with DH_Box, he was able to experiment more, and he feels the multi-paneling becomes



increasingly effective as the movie goes on. "In the end, the \$10 filter became our most valuable storytelling tool," he remarks.

One challenge was trying to devise fresh multi-panels as the movie progressed. "It became a real brain teaser to try not to repeat myself," says Ritter. He also learned to apply the technique to underscore the emotion of scenes and enhance their dramatic effect. "When you get to scenes where the really aggressive, violent actions are happening, there are more abrupt cuts, and there's also more black space onscreen," he explains. "Also, having an image separate down the middle during a dialogue scene really helped us create drama."

Fong says watching the multi-paneling develop reminded him how flexible cinema can be as a storytelling medium. He points out that when he does comic-book illustration, he works with six or seven images on a page. "That's basically what we had with the multi-paneling," he says. "Digital tools enable cinema to become more of a graphic-design and layout medium."

When Ritter began post on *KatieBird*, he discovered there wasn't a lot of information about how to edit an HD project, particularly one with such a tiny budget. He subsequently tried several approaches that he warns other filmmakers against. For example, on the advice of someone who presented himself as an HD expert, Ritter decided to downconvert his master tapes and edit on DVCam, which he captured into Final Cut Pro using an Aurora Igniter card. He had shot at 23.98 fps, but he captured at 29.97 because he'd been assured that when he did his online, the

footage would match up perfectly. In fact, when he did the online he found that every edit was off by one to three frames. Because *KatieBird* has about 5,000 edits, the online process, which should have taken a few days, ended up taking 10 weeks.

Also, Final Cut Pro does all of its cropping based on percentages of the size of the image, so when Ritter went from the 4x3 DVCam image he'd been working with to the 16x9 images of the masters, he found that none of the cropping translated over correctly. He had to redo the multi-paneling for the entire movie.

Ritter did the online himself, upgrading his video card to a Blackmagic DeckLink HD card. "It's a phenomenal card," he says, adding that if he had the chance to do post again, he would capture the HD footage using Photo JPEG proxies, which are the same resolution as HD footage. "We never would have had to go through all those additional post steps." However, he's a little glad he did. "I thought I was pretty good at Final Cut Pro, but now I feel so comfortable with the machine. I hope never to face those problems again, but

it's the only way to learn."

After the edit and online were finished, Fong and Ritter carried out the color correction. "Josh was there around the clock," says Ritter. They began by using the three-way color-corrector filter in Final Cut Pro. Fong went through a scene, made the different footage match and established the overall look, and then Ritter took the corrected footage and applied a color shift to the entire scene. Scenes depicting teenaged *KatieBird* were tinted green, scenes with adult *KatieBird* were blue, and scenes featuring *KatieBird*'s father were a muted gold. But Fong and Ritter quickly found that applying the color tint affected the original color correction, and shots no longer matched. After several weeks of battling the problem, Ritter tried using blend modes rather than traditional color-correction filters for the second part of the process. He explains, "Let's say I needed to drop down highlights. Instead of trying to pull down the whites, I would make a white panel, layer it on top of the image, and use a blend mode like Darken or Multiply." He could also create the tints by using a

Above: During a psychiatry session, *KatieBird* recounts the impact her murdering father (Lee Perkins) had on her childhood, which led her to follow in her father's footsteps (below). Editing in Final Cut Pro, Ritter used a \$10 plugin to quickly reposition, resize and crop an image.



semi-opaque color panel for the top layer. The new technique meant entire sequences could be tinted at once, and the overall color shifts wouldn't destroy Fong's original color correction. Equally important was the fact that working this way introduced no additional grain or degradation to the images.

Ritter says people are so stunned when they learn how low *KatieBird*'s budget was that he has stopped sharing the information. In one instance, he says, a distributor backed out of an agreement to handle the movie because he claimed that if Blockbuster found out he was offering them such an inexpensive movie, it would be harder to negotiate with the outlet in the future. "The most frustrating thing is that when people find out what it cost, they want to take advantage," says Ritter. "But if we'd paid for everything, it would have cost maybe half a million dollars. Everybody on the show was a volunteer. The hard-cash cost was low, but I gave up years of my life, and other people gave us so much help because they believed in what we were doing."

Ritter has submitted *KatieBird* to several film festivals, and a screening at (Yet) Another Hole in the Head in San Francisco in June 2005 was particularly successful, garnering coverage in *Fangoria* and interest from distributors. Ritter ultimately decided to go with a small company, Heretic Films, which released *KatieBird* on DVD in late February. There are also plans for limited theatrical releases in New York and San Francisco.

Ritter says he made *KatieBird* partly because he wanted to empower young artists who are always looking for excuses not to finish, or even start, their projects. "How many times do you meet someone with a screenplay who says they can't let anyone see it until it's perfect? I decided to push forward without ever looking back. I wanted to remove any room for excuses. Making a movie like this is a really scary venture, but if *KatieBird* can be in *Fangoria* and *American Cinematographer*, almost anything can happen."



Distribution Options Blossom for Indies

by Stephanie Argy

For most independent filmmakers, getting traditional theatrical distribution has always been difficult, but new technologies are providing new and varied ways for them to connect to potential audiences. "We have to unlearn a lot of things that have been drilled into our heads," says Daniel Myrick, co-director of *The Blair Witch Project* and creator of the Web serial *The Strand*. "It used to be you'd make a movie and hope you'd get into festivals, and festivals, of course, were about getting picked up by distributors. But all that has changed. As an emerging filmmaker, you almost have to throw out the rulebook."

The facts regarding traditional distribution are daunting. As production and postproduction tools have become more accessible, the market has been flooded with movies. This year, the Sundance Film Festival alone received 3,148 feature submissions and 4,327 short-form submissions. Because many companies that used to acquire movies at festivals have gone into production themselves, they now use festivals to publicize their own products rather than seeking others.

The advent of DVDs has also changed the economics of distribution. "About 10 years ago, VHS copies sold

for \$80 to \$90 each," says Carlo Scanduzzi, an independent filmmaker and co-founder of online DVD vendor IndieFlix. "The number of units sold hasn't changed very much, but the same unit in DVD is only about \$9. You're generating a fraction of the money that you used to generate 10 years ago, so the economics are no longer there for the old paradigm."

Although the old models of film distribution may be breaking down, new ones have come along that make it easier for many more filmmakers to get their work seen. These include the Internet, cellular phones with video capability, and Apple's video iPod. "Theatrical distribution is no longer the holy grail," says Justin Bergeron, co-founder and CEO of HD Pictures & Post.

Slamdance co-founder Dan Mirvish says he advises filmmakers to ask themselves what they want to get out of their projects: "Do you need to make money to pay back your investors? Do you need the perfectly justifiable ego boost of showing a film in front of an audience? Do you want to enhance your career? Do you want to build a good press kit? Focusing on what you want forces you to make decisions."

Many independent filmmakers still begin by screening their movies at festivals and seeking some sort of theatrical exhibition. "Most of the money comes from television [rights] and DVD, but most of the prestige comes from a theatrical release," says Margot Gerber, who co-

Open House photo courtesy of BugEater Films. *The Strand* photos courtesy of Gearhead Pictures.

founded the Alternative Screen Independent Film Showcase at the American Cinematheque. To generate some of that prestige, some filmmakers who haven't found theatrical distribution work with bookers who help place their films in theaters on the indie circuit. However, once the costs of prints, shipping and advertising are tallied, this can be an expensive proposition.

But even in the theatrical realm, the paradigm is changing. "One of the more exciting developments in theatrical is digital projection," says Myrick. "Once theaters convert, they will open themselves up to a whole range of content. There will be no more middleman and no more prints or deliverables hassles, which can be enormously expensive." He adds that when *The Blair Witch Project* was screened at Sundance, the festival projected only film, and the 35mm print the filmmakers had to strike cost five times more than the entire production.

Theatrical-delivery options are also evolving. National CineMedia, an in-theater advertising company owned by Cinemark USA, AMC Theatres and Regal Entertainment Group, has built a digital-distribution network called DHN, which delivers advertising and pre-recorded events to theaters via satellite. Now the company is beginning to use the same system for independent films. According to Tom Galley, chief operations and technology officer, independent filmmakers provide a master, generally on D5, which is then digitized, encrypted and sent to the theaters authorized to receive the movie. According to Galley, the current system is not digital cinema because the theaters are using lower-cost LCD projectors, but it does offer independent filmmakers a cost-effective way to get their movies out to a relatively wide audience. "So far, we've done it on up to 250 screens," says Galley. "It puts them in a business that otherwise would be prohibitive."

For most filmmakers, though, theatrical exhibition is most valuable as a means to generate buzz that will help DVD sales. And although there are distributors who handle DVD releases, there are also many options available for



Opposite: To publicize his musical film *Open House*, director Dan Mirvish launched a campaign to reactivate the Academy Awards' dormant Original Musical category. **This page, top and bottom:** Daniel Myrick went so far as to make his California-set serial *The Strand* specifically for the Web.

filmmakers who want to self-distribute their DVDs. Web sites such as indieflix.com, filmbaby.com, microcinema.com and even amazon.com all sell DVDs by independent filmmakers, and both greencine.com and netflix.com rent them. "Netflix is very open to buying smaller films," says Gerber. Noting that the company has started to produce its own movies (such as *Comedians of Comedy*), she adds, "They're very interested in promoting their little stable of indie films."

IndieFlix founders Scanduzzi and Scilla Andreen estimate every independent movie has a core fan base of 200-300 people — typically cast, crew, and friends and relatives. Although that isn't a lot of people, an online library of 1,000 films that each attract that many viewers means hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom would never otherwise seek out indie films, are connecting to the community as a whole. Andreen and Scanduzzi are trying to create a Web site that invites those people to explore further and learn about other films in the collection. The key to making the idea work, they say, is for filmmakers to be active about promoting their movies. "There's a certain amount of education we need to do with filmmakers," says Scanduzzi. "We need to make them understand that they have a lot more clout than they think they have."

Shultz agrees that grassroots efforts are the most effective way to publicize a movie. "Find a core audience that's interested in your film. Whatever

it is, there's a niche, and you've got to find it. If it's a film about the elderly, get the word out to people who work in gerontology."

Film-festival consultant Thomas Ethan Harris says that kind of niche marketing is one of the reasons gay films are so successful. "If you make a love story with two white lovers, where do you advertise that feature? There aren't 'white lover' magazines. But there are gay TV networks and free gay publications distributed on the street. Gay viewers can find out directly about projects that would interest them."

Scanduzzi and Andreen hope IndieFlix will provide another way to connect filmmakers with their audiences. "Often we see filmgoers talking to filmgoers and filmmakers talking to filmmakers," says Scanduzzi. "But we would like filmmakers and filmgoers to have a dialogue. Filmmakers can get a pulse on what the audience thinks, good or bad. And they will have a built-in audience for



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the next movie and can start talking about it before they even start shooting."

Publicity of all sorts is also important. Harris says that for a DVD release, quotable critics become essential, which is why it's worthwhile for a movie to play at important festivals. But filmmakers are also getting much more entrepreneurial, promoting their movies on MySpace, creating podcasts, and even, in the case of Mirvish's *Open House*, launching a quixotic but well-publicized campaign to reactivate the dormant Academy Award category for Original Musical. "If the goal is to get attention for your film and build a fan base for an eventual DVD release, there's more than one way to skin a cat," says Mirvish. "You need something to boost your profile, and what it is isn't necessarily the most obvious thing."

One of the best-known movies promoted with guerrilla tactics was *The Blair Witch Project*, which created an online mystique that has become legendary among indie filmmakers. Myrick has taken his use of the Internet to an even higher level with his current project, *The Strand*. He got the idea for the show, an ongoing series set in Venice, California, two years ago. He took it around to the television networks, but at that time executives had trouble grasping the idea of a reality/fiction hybrid. Myrick decided to shoot the first few episodes on his own to demonstrate the concept, and as he started to promote them on the Web, he realized the Internet had become a legitimate avenue of distribution for such a project — as well as a better way to maintain control of it. "The idea of going back to the networks with a pitch didn't appeal so much anymore," he recalls. "We hope this will be a kind of launch pad for other shows."

Myrick has partnered with several technology companies, including Brightcove and BitPass, which handle the technical and financial end of the online distribution. "The technology is literally changing month to month," he says. "The real hurdle is that filmmakers want to keep our heads in what we think we're good at: going out and shooting

the stuff. Guys like Brightcove allow guys like me to focus on the creative." BitPass founder Kurt Huang notes that companies like his also help filmmakers build a relationship with their fans. "Building a brand is currently an important direction for a lot of filmmakers," he says. "It's almost like a music label, but without the Draconian contractual relationships." Huang believes a Web serial like *The Strand* is probably the best fit for the Internet at the moment. "You can give away the first episode and get people hooked."

The biggest recent development in distribution may be the release of Apple's video iPod, which Mirvish predicts will revitalize the market for short films, at least for a little while. "In the dot-com boom of the late '90s, all the attention and distribution were with the shorts," he recalls. "After the dot-com crash, shorts once again became second-class citizens. My guess is there will be a return to the frenzy, because now everyone wants short things to put on cell phones and iPods. There will be a window of about a year or two when it's hot to make shorts."

Although the prospect of sorting through new distribution possibilities may seem overwhelming, David Levy, president of production at HD Pictures & Post, notes that even the studios must contend with it. "I promise you, at Sony and Paramount and Warner Bros. they're saying, 'How are we going to get our heads and arms wrapped around all this new stuff? How can we succeed where the recording industry has failed in terms of being cutting edge and not being left in the dust?' The independent filmmaker, even the guerrilla filmmaker, is just as far along in figuring this stuff out as the big guys on the backlot. If you're comfortable working at a modest budget, you can be confident that there will be a way to get your work out there." Myrick adds, "I love the fact that things are changing at such a fundamental level. In my opinion, there's never been a better time to be an independent filmmaker." ■

New Products & Services

Assessing Panasonic's AG-DVX100B

by Jay Holben

Panasonic recently released the AG-DVX100B, a revision of the DVX100A, with 22 updates and changes both major and minor.

The camera's onscreen menu system has been given a slight overhaul, and I didn't notice the differences until I looked at the DVX100A and 100B side by side. The 100B has a new, smaller font that makes the overall menu layout per "screen" cleaner and easier to read. The new camera also boasts a new paint job with a suave name: Black Sapphire. Amazingly, the new color scheme improves the readability of buttons and labels inside the flip-out viewing screen, even in relatively low-light conditions. This is a nice improvement over the 100A.

The standard camera package now comes with a larger, longer-lasting CGR-D54 5400mA battery that extends the 45-minute capacity of the previous CGR-D16 1600mA battery to more than five hours. Panasonic has also adjusted the zoom speed at the "medium" setting to fall more naturally in line between slow and fast.

The improvement in the Electronic View Finder's (EVF) resolution is impressive, even though it has only grown from 180,000 dots to 230,000 dots. The physical screen size — .44" — hasn't changed, but detail is easier to see. Unfortunately, that doesn't improve the ability to judge critical focus. (Panasonic offers an enhanced detail feature for both the EVF and flip-out viewfinder, which makes critical focus *much* easier to attain). An interesting addition to the EVF is the ability to switch between black-and-white and color for contrast viewing.

The tripod mount on the base of



the camera has been reinforced. Although I had no quarrel with the previous mount, if a user adds matteboxes, a follow focus and other accessories, the beefier mount should be welcome.

The manufacturing process for the 100B has been altered so that the camera is now RoHS (Restrictions on Hazardous Substances)-compliant, ensuring it is environmentally safe. (Primarily, this means the new manufacturing process eliminates lead.) Also, the End Search function has been modified to work in Camera mode so the user doesn't have to switch to VCR mode to find the end of the previously recorded material.

With the 100B, Panasonic has found a way to eliminate the sound echo everyone encounters when recording in 24p mode with the DVX100 and 100A. When shooting in 24p and monitoring the sound from the headphone jack, a user will experience a two-frame delay that created an echo effect on the natural location sound. This slight problem makes audio monitoring from the camera nearly impossible in 24p mode. The 100B has a menu feature, identified as "HP" (for Head Phones), that enables users to switch from "live" (which monitors audio straight from the mike) to "tape" (which monitors from the record head). "Live" eliminates the echo, but

because it has much more room tone, hiss and high end, there is a considerable quality difference between it and the "tape" setting. So what is the recording really going to sound like? Thorough testing prior to recording is required.

One of the next features is the ability to connect two DVX100s together to transfer Scene file settings or time-code information from one camera to the other. At first, the idea of syncing two cameras was very exciting. I didn't have two 100Bs, so I hooked a 100B to a 100A and followed the rather convoluted steps outlined in the manual to transfer the time code from the B (master) to the A (slave). I accomplished that, and the time codes matched, but that was it. Although the cameras were still connected, hitting Record on the master didn't start the slave. In the end, the transfer was no different than merely presetting the time code manually on the slave camera to match the master camera. Additionally, transferring the time code from one camera to the other was more difficult than manually adjusting the presets.

The 100B's tape-drive mechanism has been upgraded to be more rugged. Although this is nice change, it also creates an annoyance: when you load the tape and close the drive, you

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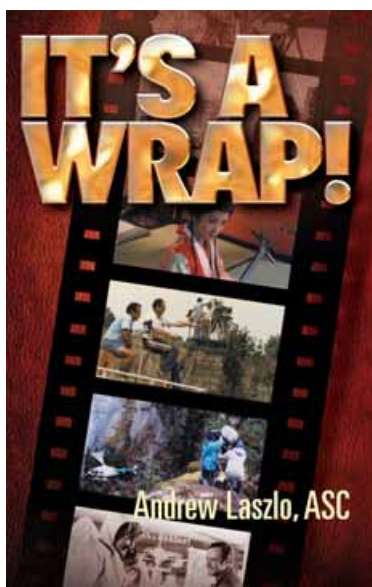
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have to wait for the drive to lower and the heads to engage before you can shut the outer door. When you're running and gunning, waiting for the drive to drop before you can close the outer door is bothersome. Also, this update apparently has eliminated the "interval rec" feature that the 100 and 100A had. It's still possible to do one-frame recording, but there is no longer a built-in intervalometer for time-lapse photography.

A slight breakaway has been added to the flip-out LCD screen that allows it to bend out 30° further than the previous 90° point. This allows more flexibility to operate from the flip-out screen and also reduces the risk of breaking the LCD off in the event it gets bumped. The screen has received a slight increase in resolution — from 200,000 pixels to 210,000 — but that pales in comparison to two other changes. First, it is now possible to view "squeezed" material in letterbox format. When shooting in 16x9 digital anamorphic mode with the 100A, you viewed a squeezed image on the LCD and in the EVF. In the 100B's "squeeze" mode, you view a letterboxed image. There is also a mode that allows you to manually control the aspect ratio; when using an optical anamorphic adapter, you can manually dial in the proper image to see an unsqueezed picture. Additionally, Panasonic has increased the viewing area to the full recorded frame, not just the "overscan" area.

Finally, and probably most significantly, Panasonic claims the 100B's LCD screen is a matter of "what you see is what you get." Being well acquainted with the limitations of LCD technology, I was keen to test this claim. The first problem is that, as with nearly all LCD screens, the angle at which you view the screen considerably alters the reproduction of the image. By experimenting a bit, I found a position that seemed to represent the best contrast on the LCD monitor, with the richest blacks. This position seemed to be about 20° tilted away from perpendicular to my vision. Any variance greater than 5° in any direction seemed to degrade the quality

of the blacks and contrast. Right away, this puts a kink in the "what you see is what you get" theory, as you are only getting what you see as long as you're seeing it from the precise position.

I hooked the 100B via an S-video cable to a JCV TM-H1750CGU high-resolution 17" NTSC monitor. Using the SMPTE bars generated from the DVX, I balanced the monitor's color, brightness and contrast. Then I turned to the LCD. Of course, the DVX doesn't have a blue-gun-only feature to calibrate the color, so I turned to the custom blue filter provided in Joe Kane's excellent DVD *Video Essentials: Optimizing Your Audio/Video System*, and balanced the color looking through that filter at the LCD. Surprisingly, it fell in line pretty nicely, better than most old NTSC monitors I've had to balance in the field. I also placed the 100A next to the 100B and set it accordingly. The 100A's LCD screen clearly exhibited much weaker blacks, and the color didn't quite fall in as well.

Then I put up my Gamma & Density Gamma 2U color chart, lit it and framed it up with both DVXs. The JVC monitor was positioned right in my line of sight so that I could stand at the 100B with the LCD at the optimum position and also see the NTSC monitor. I was very quickly impressed at how accurately the LCD represented what I was seeing on the monitor. The 100A's LCD was nowhere near the quality and accuracy I was seeing with the 100B. The latter was not perfect, but it was quite close. Overall, the NTSC monitor had a little more color saturation (especially comparing SMPTE bars), particularly in the blue and green, but hue and contrast representation seemed dead on. The LCD was nowhere near as sharp as the NTSC monitor, however, so fine lines in the chart weren't as clear on the camera as they were on the monitor, especially around the red portions of the chart, where the color seemed to bleed ever so slightly on the LCD.

I concentrated on the two areas of the Gamma 2U chart designated to represent video 100IRE and 90IRE. These are very close together, and it is

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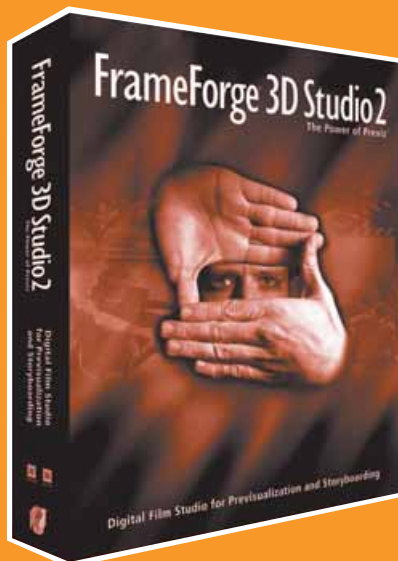
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hard to distinguish their different brightness values on an NTSC monitor when exposing for 18 percent gray to 55 IRE. Starting with the chart slightly overexposed, I began stopping down the iris on the camera until I visually could distinguish a difference between the 100 IRE and 90 IRE areas on the LCD monitor. I then did the same thing while watching the NTSC monitor and discovered that I could discern a difference between the two areas on the NTSC monitor about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a stop earlier than I could while looking at the LCD screen — not a significant difference.

I brought in a strand of Christmas lights to see how well the camera represented high contrast. Putting the lights on the black back of my color chart and zooming in on a single bulb, I exposed the image on the LCD monitor to taste and then began comparing that image to the NTSC monitor. The LCD screen reproduced the plume from the filament of the bulb just *slightly* larger than the NTSC monitor did — 5 to 10 percent at most. Looking at the LCD on the 100A, the plume from the filament completely filled the bulb; there were no discernible details in the bulb at all. On the 100B, there were definitely details that were almost exactly what I was seeing on the NTSC monitor.

I was extremely impressed that the LCD monitor performed as well as it did. Of course, the moment I introduced any ambient flare on the LCD or moved it out of the prime position, the “what you see is what you get” effect was obliterated. When operating the camera on a daytime exterior, you won’t see what you’re getting unless you shield the LCD from all ambient light. But if you’re shooting onstage and can position the LCD just right, you’ll be amazed by the image’s accuracy. In the real world, however, you would do well to have a reference NTSC monitor that has been properly set and shaded.

The upgrades to the 100B clearly show that Panasonic is listening and responding to its user base. For more information, visit http://panasonic.com/business/provideo/cat_camcorders.asp or call (800) 222-0741.

Magic Bullet Editors v2.0

by Jay Holben

Designed for integration into nonlinear-editing programs, Magic Bullet Editors version 2.0 features Magic Bullet’s Look Suite with a few extra tools, but without the well-known 24p conversion capability. Look Suite is a custom color-correction and filter set that allows the user to create a variety of interesting looks, including bleach bypass, color grads, and cross processing.

In Magic Bullet Editors v2.0, the Look Suite includes adjustments to pre-filtration gamma, contrast and saturation. You can add “camera filters” such as white diffusion, black diffusion and color gradients, and you can simulate a three-strip Technicolor look. Finally, Look Suite adds post-filtration applications of overall warm/cool color tone and post-filtration gamma, contrast and saturation. It is just a bit more than the color correction and filters that come with Apple’s Final Cut Pro.

Magic Bullet boasts DeepColor technology, a proprietary rendering algorithm that processes pixels at four times the precision of similar applications and applies floating-point imaging processing to ensure the highest possible output quality. I tested this against one of my favorite filter sets, Digital Film Tree’s 55MM v5.0. Both were applied in Final Cut Pro 5.0 on the same 24p-originated footage from a Canon XL2 on a dual 2GHz PowerMac G5 with 1.5GB RAM. With the 55MM suite, I had much more precise control over the built-in matting power and more than twice as many preset filters than with Magic Bullet. For some odd reason, the preset Magic Bullet looks for Final Cut Pro aren’t available from the pulldown effects menu; instead, they are enclosed on the software disc as a project file from which you have to open and then copy the filters. This seems like a tedious step.

Working with one minute of footage, I took the Bleach-Bypass filter from 55MM and Magic Bullet and applied each to the same footage (see images above). The first major differ-



ence was the render times. For Magic Bullet to apply the default Bleach Bypass preset look on one minute of DV footage, rendering took 31 minutes 13 seconds. The default 55MM Bleach-Bypass filter on the same footage took 7 minutes 20 seconds, significantly less. With a bit of tweaking on both filters, I was able to quickly achieve nearly identical results in appearance and rendered each out. I then compared them side by side, enlarged to 400 percent, to see what happened to the picture. Looking just at the eyeball of the subject in the DV footage, I examined both images on Apple 23" Cinema Display screen and on a JVC TM-H1750 high-resolution NTSC monitor. The two effects weren’t identical, but they were very close. The 55MM retained more detail in the iris of the eye, but Magic Bullet seemed to have a slightly less blockier contrast with slightly more details in the fold of the subject’s eye. The blacks on the Magic Bullet were somewhat stronger than the 55MM filter. Aside from that, there were no differences in terms of resolution or artifacting resulting from rendering.

Aside from color-correction filtration, Magic Bullet Editors offers the MisFire suite of filters to emulate various kinds of damage associated with film-originated material. This set of filters is valuable to the common user, although it would most likely be applied with a very light touch. You can create

film-like scratches, flicker, gate weave, blotches, dust, grain and more. Again, render times are a little high; one minute of DV footage took 16 minutes 43 seconds to render for the default settings on the Gate Weave filter.

Editor Eric Tozzi has become a big fan of the Magic Bullet Editors tool. While cutting the documentary *Armand*, about the painter Armand Merizon, Tozzi worked with a large amount of material that had been shot by members of the painter's family. "Most of what they had shot was natural-light, run-and-gun footage," recalls Tozzi. "Magic Bullet was a life-saver, because I could quickly run through a number of different looks to see which would work for a given sequence and really sweeten up the footage. I like the flexibility Magic Bullet gives you; with open presets, you have the ability to tweak almost infinitely. It isn't just 'one template fits all.'" Tozzi is currently cutting the TV series *Travel the Road*, whose post team is using the full version of Magic Bullet to set the final look of the show.

Magic Bullet Editors is available from Red Giant Software for \$395 and works with Final Cut Pro, Avid Xpress Pro, Motion, Sony Vegas and Adobe Premiere Pro.

For more information, visit www.redgiantsoftware.com or call (260) 625-5343. ■

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Points East

Students at Boston University Create *Roller Palace*

by Patricia Thomson



Above: Doug (Dann Maurno) has a video chat with his daughter from his cell as fellow con Suaze (Franco Trambino) lurks in the background. **Below:** Cinematographer Rohan Chitrakar (foreground) makes final lighting adjustments in the cell with the help of a hi-def monitor.

Forget the ivory tower. "Baptism by fire" is how Boston University's Paul Schneider describes the New Television Workshop, his eight-credit class that will culminate this month with the broadcast of a TV pilot written, produced and crewed by BU students. The half-hour comedy, *Roller Palace*, will debut March 20 on mtvU, a channel owned by MTV that reaches more than 725 colleges and universities. "Most of the students had never encountered anything of this scale," says Schneider, a

veteran film and television director/producer whose credits include *JAG*, *L.A. Law* and *Beverly Hills 90210*. "They did an actual production from start to finish with all the difficulties of being on location, shooting in winter, and with the proper prep, budgeting and scheduling. In hindsight, I think we could have made it 12 credits because it was a huge amount of work."

When Schneider arrived at BU's Film & Television Department in 2002, he noticed a paucity of outlets for TV-

writing students, so he devised a TV-writing competition. BU alumnus Ted Harbert, CEO of E! Networks, organized a panel of professional judges in Los Angeles and a \$2,500 prize. "One day I casually suggested to our department chair, Charles Merzbacher, that it would be great to actually produce the [winning] script," says Schneider. "Everybody thought it was a great idea. The only problem was coming up with the money."

In 2004, Schneider found a willing broadcaster in mtvU, which in turn helped locate funding through MSN, one of its advertisers. "In return," says Schneider, "we had to integrate their video-conferencing technology into our script. As it turns out, we came up with a clever way of doing it that makes the script even funnier." The 2005 winner, written by Liz Coopersmith, "is about a pampered, wealthy woman in her early 20s living in Manhattan," he explains. "Her father has recently been incarcerated for insider trading. As the pilot opens, she discovers her mother is divorced and is marrying her high-school sweetheart, who owns a hot-dog emporium on the Jersey Shore. This spoiled girl suddenly has to relocate to the Jersey Shore, and her life is turned upside-down. It's a fish-out-of-water story." As for incorporating MSN Messenger, he says, "We posit that the father is such a con man that he's obtained a video link in jail so his daughter can talk to him via her laptop computer."

Coopersmith's script came out of Schneider's spring 2005 Advanced Writing for Television class. By fall, 14 production students had been selected for the New Television Workshop, where they would become the crew. Among them, the frontrunner for director of



Photos by John Messenger. Frame grab and photos courtesy of Rohan Chitrakar.

photography was Rohan Chitrakar, a second-year master's student who had a background in still photography and some documentary experience. "Rohan is a very talented young man," says Schneider. "When I asked around the department about who might be qualified, the consensus was that he was the person."

The camera department included three others, Josh Carroll (camera operator), Shannon Mita (1st AC) and Sam Rosenthal (2nd AC). Corinne Pickett was the gaffer and Blake Smith was the key grip. Meanwhile, students from BU's School of Theatre did production design, and acting majors supplemented the professional cast.

No one in Schneider's class had ever worked with a crew of that size — student films typically involve no more than four students. "In the past, I've done almost everything with the lighting and the camera," says Chitrakar. "On this project, we had huge crew responsibilities and so many different departments. It was mind-boggling for me to realize I didn't have to do everything, and that my responsibility as director of photography was to be more of a leader, to delegate tasks. It was really hard in the beginning because I'm a very hands-on person, and it was very hard to communicate exactly what I was thinking to Josh or the gaffer during the first few practices. Slowly I realized how important it was to express the visual ideas I had."

Instrumental in this learning process was another BU instructor, Austin de Besche, a Boston-based cinematographer (*Return of the Secaucus 7*, *Lianna*) and director. He was one of several professionals recruited to act as mentors and provide technical training. De Besche gave students a crash course on Panasonic's high-definition AJ-HDC27F VariCam, as well as the Zeiss 35mm prime lenses and P&S Technik Pro 35 adapter system chosen for the single-camera shoot. "Because we do a fair amount of 16mm, and because hi-def video may be where we're going in the future, we felt it would be interesting to

try this format," says Schneider. De Besche adds, "It was totally the right choice. The students could work it easily into their particular editing system. It's professional-level both in terms of the picture it takes and in terms of the handling. It's got all the controls they will have to think about in a professional situation." (The HD package was supplied by Boston Camera, while grip and electric gear came from High Output.)

De Besche created hands-on exercises almost immediately. "I would say, 'Okay, let's set up a shot. What are you going to do first? Go ahead and try that.' Then, 'Maybe the reason you *shouldn't* do it that way is this, [and] if you go about it this other way, it'll be more efficient. And while you're doing *that*, your assistant should be working on *this*.' It was making a list of tasks and helping them get those done in the right order." Working with Chitrakar, de Besche steered him towards finding a personal style, doing tests to show the director, and giving instructions clearly. "I'd explain how *not* to jump away from the supervisory work to plug in an extension cord," says de Besche. "It's important to keep that hierarchy in place so the boss is always looking at the big picture. It's easy for helpful people to say, 'Gee, we need an extension cord! I'll go get it.' But it's really inefficient. That took some convincing."

Students had to become accus-

tomed to 7 a.m. calls, meeting a daily schedule, and contending with the hazards of location shoots in wintry Massachusetts. One day, 50-mph winds threatened to bowl over their HMLs; another day, the temperature was so cold the Pro 35 adapter froze. All the while, students were executing challenging camera moves, often using a Steadicam or Fisher dollies, equipment lacking in their regular classes. "[Schneider] did not back off and give nothing but easy camera setups," de Besche attests. "There were definitely complex moves going on quite often, and everybody responded pretty darn well."

Carroll says his trickiest shot was a handheld close-up of two women wrestling on the ground. "I had to get on my knees and pull focus at the same time," he recalls. "It was really difficult because the camera didn't have handles." For Chitrakar, a big challenge was motivating camera moves. "I gradually realized when they would be appropriate," he says. "By the end, I was able to discuss this with Paul, and it ended up being a pretty good dialogue."

De Besche notes that real equipment, real shooting schedules and real challenges made this a different experience from many cinematography classes, including his own. "This was, 'Bang! Here's the real world. You gotta make it work.' And they did." ■



Chitrakar inspects the frozen Pro 35 lens adapter as bitter temperatures bring the production to an unexpected halt.

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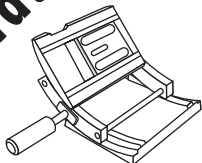
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Electronics 69
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Cinequipt 83
Cineworks 29
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Film Emporium, Inc. 90
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Fletcher Chicago 40
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Glidecam Industries 19
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Innoventive Software 83
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Professional Sound 95
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Sharpshooter 10
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Clubhouse News



New Member

Long known as a mentor to both aspiring and established filmmakers, **Ron Dexter, ASC** has been welcomed into the Society's ranks.

Dexter's interest in film can be traced to his years in the U.S. Navy, when he first took up still photography. After leaving the service, he attended the University of California-Berkeley, where he continued shooting, developing and printing stills and discovered the films of Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Jean Renoir and David Lean. Upon graduating with a degree in psychology, Dexter decided motion pictures were a "higher form" of photography, and he audited production courses at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) while working in the school's film department. His first break came on the Disney wildlife film *Sam Connors and the Wahoo Bobcat*, for which he built sets and worked on the camera crew.

Dexter's career has since encompassed special effects (he worked with Linwood Dunn, ASC and Cecil Love on *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*), the Academy Award-nominated documentary *Harvest* (which he shot for Carroll Ballard), *Star Trek* (for which he made star background plates), and the Roger Corman film *Gasss* (on which Dexter

convinced Corman to sign one of his only union contracts). He has also photographed more than 450 commercials and public-service spots.

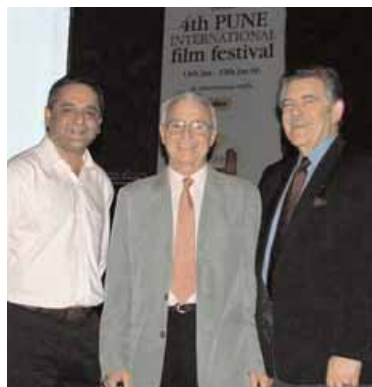
Over the years, Dexter has developed numerous products for the film industry, many of which prefigured advances made by other companies, and he has never hesitated to retool gear to better suit his needs. His contributions include DXTR tube track with skateboard-wheel dollies, the "Pitching Lens" system (made in collaboration with Continental Camera), and the "Shaki-Cam" (which later became the Body Mount and Pogo Cam).

Dexter and his wife, Jill, have operated their own production company for 22 years, and he has taught at UCLA, University of California-Santa Barbara and Santa Barbara Community College.

Kemper Receives Lifetime Achievement Award

Victor J. Kemper, ASC was recently honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Fourth Annual Pune International Film Festival in Pune, India. The award, which celebrated Kemper's contributions to advancing the global art of filmmaking, marked the first time the festival presented a tribute to a cinematographer.

Kemper's credits include *The Candidate*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *The Last Tycoon*, *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, *Pee-*



wee's Big Adventure, *The Gambler* and *The Eyes of Laura Mars*.

Associate Member

Hetos Dies

Philip Hetos, the first color timer to receive onscreen credit (for 1983's *Scarface*), died on January 8 at the age of 73.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Hetos first found work in the film business with a job at Paramount



Studios in 1949. The following years saw him try his hand at various jobs in the industry, and he eventually became a color timer, a position he enjoyed at Pathé Lab, Movie Lab, Technicolor, Deluxe Laboratories and CFI. His credits include *Young Guns*, *Sneakers*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Magnolia* and *Road to Perdition*. In addition to being an associate member of the ASC, Hetos was a longtime member of Film Technicians Local 683.

He is survived by his wife, Judy Taylor; sons Philip (Mike) Hetos and Doug Taylor; daughters Rhonda Vanderver and Cindy Lainez; a sister, Dorothy Palis; a brother, David Hetos; and 11 grandchildren. ■

Left: Kodak's Rajesh Jiandani, Victor Kemper, ASC and ASC associate member Milt Sheffer.

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ASC CLOSE-UP

M. David Mullen, ASC

When you were a child, what film made the strongest impression on you?

The first *Godzilla* was a childhood favorite when it played on TV; it actually has a fairly atmospheric black-and-white look. I also loved the early Disney animated features. By high school, I was a big fan of the original *Star Trek* series. But the biggest impact came from seeing *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in a movie theater when I was 15. It was the ultimate cinematic experience of my youth. I'm still in awe of that movie.

Which cinematographers, past or present, do you most admire?

Vittorio Storaro, ASC, AIC; Gordon Willis, ASC; Conrad Hall, ASC; Geoffrey Unsworth, BSC; Jack Cardiff, BSC; Gregg Toland, ASC; David Watkin, BSC; Gabriel Figueroa, AMC; Néstor Almendros, ASC; Robert Richardson, ASC; Roger Deakins, ASC, BSC; Allen Daviau, ASC; Freddie Young, BSC; Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC; George Barnes, ASC; and Jordan Cronenweth, ASC — to name a few.

What sparked your interest in photography?

My father always has been an avid photographer, so it was part of my childhood. In high school, I remember first learning about cinematographers when I noticed that *Superman: The Movie* was dedicated to the late Geoffrey Unsworth. I loved his pastel, fog-filtered work on that movie and managed to find the *American Cinematographer* article that his operator, Peter MacDonald, wrote about working with him. What deeply impressed me was the admiration that directors and crews who had worked with Unsworth expressed for him as a human being and an artist.

Where did you train and/or study?

I started making Super 8 movies when I was in high school and didn't attend film school until I was 27, so a decade of self-learning passed before I got any formal training [at CalArts]. I arrived at film school more or less proficient with the basics of camera and lighting, and I was asked to shoot dozens of graduate-thesis projects for other students. So what I learned in film school was less about technical matters and more about working with directors and crews.

Who were your early teachers or mentors?

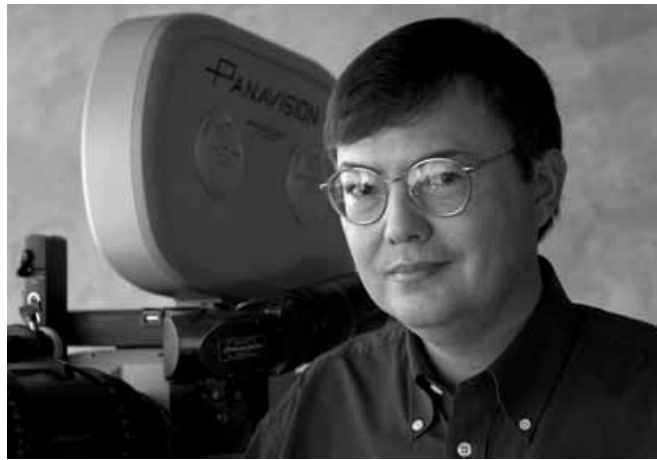
I relied heavily on back issues of *American Cinematographer* as my private film school; I read every issue going back to the late 1920s and re-read the 1970s issues (a great period for the magazine and for movies) numerous times. At CalArts, my graduate-thesis adviser and mentor was Kris Malkiewicz, author of the textbook *Cinematography*, which I had actually memorized a decade before meeting him. I recently got to collaborate with Kris on a new edition of that book, a great honor.

What are some of your key artistic influences?

My mother is Japanese, and living in a house with Japanese art on the walls certainly influenced my early aesthetic development — as did, perhaps, the many Japanese monster movies on TV. Growing up in the California desert had some impact on my sense of space and light. I love the paintings of Hopper, Caravaggio, Vermeer, Rembrandt, Sargent, da Vinci and Van Gogh. I'm also a big fan of American landscape paintings, particularly by the Hudson River School. The work and ideas of Vittorio Storaro have always been a major inspiration. My favorite directors are Kurosawa, Kubrick, Lean, Ford, Welles and Hitchcock — the usual suspects!

How did you get your first break in the business?

I started shooting features right after film school, mainly micro-budget projects that I got through connections made in school. The budgets have slowly



climbed over time. The first movie anyone noticed was *Twin Falls Idaho*, and then *Northfork*. Both were directed by Michael Polish, and both netted me Independent Spirit Award nominations.

What has been your most satisfying moment on a project?

Doing a crane shot in 35mm anamorphic on the vast plains of Montana in the winter for *Northfork*. It was the closest I've felt to doing work in the spirit of John Ford and David Lean, despite the tiny budget.

Have you made any memorable blunders?

Early on, I moved a 5K that I probably shouldn't have touched and unknowingly placed it under a fire sprinkler, which went off in this very expensive mansion. I expected the owner to throw a fit when she saw her drowned master bedroom, but it turned out she had been hoping something would go wrong. Apparently she had a habit of renting out her mansion to productions whenever she wanted to get some remodeling done, figuring that they would damage something and she'd get money from the insurance claim.

What's the best professional advice you've ever received?

I was nervous about shooting my first feature, and luckily, I ran into Allen Daviau, ASC, who advised me to know my first week of production, what I needed to do, backwards and forwards. I discovered that being hyper-prepared like that not only boosted my confidence but also set the right tone for the production. The crew quickly realizes that you know what you want and are aware of how long things should take.

What recent books, films or artworks have inspired you?

I find some of the locations where I have worked to be very inspiring. Most recently it was the Santa Fe region of New Mexico. In the past few years, Robert Richardson's cinematography for *Snow Falling on Cedars* has probably impressed me the most, as well as Conrad Hall's work in *Road to Perdition*.

Do you have any favorite genres, or genres that you would like to try?

Shooting a science-fiction movie set on a spaceship would satisfy a childhood dream, especially if it were a *Star Trek* movie. Like many cinematographers, I'd love to shoot a Western, a black-and-white film noir, and a period epic in 65mm — not necessarily in that order.

If you weren't a cinematographer, what might you be doing instead?

I'd probably be teaching filmmaking. If not, I might be trying to make a living as a writer.

Which ASC cinematographers recommended you for membership?

Robert Primes, Roy Wagner and Denis Lenoir.

How has ASC membership impacted your life and career?

For one thing, I got to cross "get into the ASC" off my list of lifelong career goals! It has been a tremendous honor and a great pleasure to meet and socialize with my heroes, some of whom were responsible for the greatest moments in cinema history. It's a wonderful organization of true artists. ■



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